

Old Sleuth Library

OLD SLEUTH'S LUCK.
By OLD SLEUTH.

A SERIES OF THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED.

No. 46

{ SINGLE
NUMBER. }

GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
Nos. 17 to 27 VANDEWATER STREET, NEW YORK.

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Vol. III.

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OLD SLEUTH'S LUCK; OR, DAY AND NIGHT IN NEW YORK. A STARTLING NARRATIVE OF HIDDEN TREASURE. BY OLD SLEUTH.



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BY OLD SLEUTH.

CHAPTER I.

"COME and save her! come quick, or she will be murdered!"

Old Sleuth, the greatest of all detectives, had not been engaged "on a case" in a long time. Indeed, it was supposed by many that he had retired from the detective business; but such is not the case. The great criminal trailer is always ready, when other detectives are baffled, to take a great case in hand.

As stated, the detective had been disengaged for a long time. He was walking along Broadway one evening, when suddenly a hand was laid upon his arm. He turned and looked down—for the touch had come from a little, pale-faced girl, poorly dressed, and very sickly looking—and as she caught the detective's eye the little girl uttered the words with which we open our narrative.

The child's eyes glared wildly, her little features were convulsed with excitement and expectancy, and her voice was tremulous. At a glance the great Sleuth saw that the girl was in earnest, and in deadly fear.

"What is the matter, my child?" said the detective, in his usual kindly voice when speaking to children or to the oppressed and terror-stricken.

"Come quick!" she answered, "or sister will be murdered!"

"Come with me, little one."

The detective led the child along, intending to turn down a side street to escape observation, as he saw that the episode was already attracting attention. They reached the corner, and he would have turned toward the west, when the child exclaimed, as she tugged at his hand:

"Come dis way! come quick!" She drew him toward the east side of the great thoroughfare.

Once away from the crowds which at all hours throng Broadway, the detective said:

"Why do you come to me, child?"

"I have been looking for you."

"You have been looking for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do not know you; who am I?"

"You are Old Sleuth, the great detective."

The officer was surprised, and he asked:

"Who told you I am Old Sleuth, the detective?"

"Micky O'Reilly pointed you out to me one day."

"And who is Micky O'Reilly?"

"He is a bootblack."

"And he told you I was Old Sleuth?"

"Yes."

"When did he tell you?"

"Oh, a good many months ago; and I've seen you often since."

"And you were looking for me to-night?"

"Yes."

"And some one is to be murdered, you think?"

"Yes, sir, sure."

"Who?"

"My sister."

"Where does your sister live?"

"I will show you."

"Who is going to murder your sister?"

"Some bad men."

"Some bad men?" repeated the detective.

"Yes."

"Why are some bad men going to murder your sister?"

"My sister will tell you all about it; let's hurry, or we will find her murdered when we get there!"

"Where?"

"At our house."

The detective did not attach much importance to the child's statements. He thought it was some neighbors' quarrel, and that the child, knowing he was a detective, in her childish fear and excitement had run out to find him. Little did he dream that he was on the verge of the greatest case that had ever attracted his attention or taxed his courage and ingenuity.

The detective from habit was always on his guard, however, and even upon the most trivial occasions fell back upon his habitual cunning. He believed there was nothing

ing in the case, as has been stated, and yet he was prepared to admit other possibilities. Caution had become a life-long habit with him, and having concluded to go with the child, he decided to work a transform. The child had recognized him as Old Sleuth, and he thought it just as well to come one of his lightning changes merely as a matter of precaution in case there should be anything in the case.

"My child," he said, "can you read?"

"Yes, sir."

"What street is that?"

The detective pointed to the half-faded little board sign on the side of an old corner house.

"I can't see from here," said the child.

"Go by the light," said Sleuth.

The child stepped away about ten feet, her little eyes fixed on the sign, and, as it fortunately chanced, there were no passers-by at the moment. The child could not decipher the sign, and she turned to rejoin Sleuth when an exclamation fell from her lips, carried in tones of deepest distress and disappointment:

"He's gone away! He's run away from me!" muttered the child, "and sister will be murdered!"

A man stood near the spot where the child had last seen Sleuth. She approached him and said:

"Did you see a gentleman go away from here?"

"What sort of a looking gentleman?" asked the man.

The little girl described Sleuth as he had appeared, and the man said:

"Who was the man?"

"A good friend of mine," answered the child.

"What is his name?"

"I do not know his name."

Sleuth was pleased. He saw that the child, even at the moment of her wonderment and distress, was cute and wary.

"I saw a gentleman here—yes."

"Where did he go?"

"Do you want to find him?"

"Yes; and I don't see where he went to. I just looked up there a moment, and when I turned he had gone away. Which way did he go?"

"The man was Sleuth the detective," came the answer, and "*He is here!*" came the added declaration.

CHAPTER II.

A BRIGHT look came to the little girl's face, and she clapped her hands gleefully and exclaimed:

"Oh, I know!"

"What do you know?"

"It's wonderful!" cried the child, testifying involuntarily to the great detective's skill as a transformist. "You have worked a change."

Sleuth laughed at the child's betrayal of a knowledge of the professional technical term.

"Little one," said the detective, "you are a very smart girl. Now listen: you must not call me Sleuth; you must never let any one guess who I am. You can say I am a missionary if any one asks you."

"Oh, I know," said the child.

The detective and the little girl resumed their journey toward the child's home. She led the officer along a few squares toward the river, and then came to a halt opposite a court, lined on either side by the walls of two great factories, while in the rear, and facing the court, appeared the glimmer of a light.

Sleuth knew the place; indeed there is not a section of the city that is not well known to him; and he remembered that at the termination of the court stood a dilapidated tenement-house, a place that in its time had been the scene of many a fight, and upon one occasion, many years ago, a terrible tragedy had occurred in the old place. It was rumored that it was haunted, and many families had moved suddenly out of the tenement, giving as a reason that they had seen strange sights and had heard strange noises.

The old house was part of an estate that was in litigation, or it would have been torn down, but the dispute as to title had resulted in its preservation; but, as Sleuth after learned, the matter had been settled, and the house was doomed, and the latter fact accounted for certain in-

cidents that were immediately brought to the detective's attention.

The child had come to a halt as she arrived opposite the court, and she glanced around furtively.

"What is the matter?" asked Sleuth.

"I'm looking to see if any of dem are around."

"Who?"

"The burglars."

"Is that where you live?"

"Yes."

"And who are the burglars?"

"Sister will tell you."

"We will go and see your sister."

The two moved along the court and soon passed beyond the line of light radiating from the street-lamp upon the sidewalk. The child moved very cautiously; the detective fell to the spirit of the strange adventure and also moved along cautiously, when suddenly there came a smothered scream from an upper room in the old house.

The child clutched the detective's hand convulsively, and in a low voice of terror, exclaimed:

"They're killing her! Come quick!"

The detective leaped forward; the scream did suggest the possibility that there was more in the adventure than he had at first supposed. He ran forward quickly, but the child glided even more rapidly and was ahead of him when they passed the entrance and reached the tumble-down stairs. The girl started to ascend, when Sleuth caught her and drew her back, and bending his lips to her ear, he whispered:

"Hold! come back! Some one is descending the stairs."

The detective had heard the old stairs creak, and he knew that some one was cautiously descending; and, drawing the child back, he said:

"You run back there in the hall. Do not move or speak, no matter what happens, until I speak to you, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Remember, now, I am Sleuth; all will be well, but keep silent; even though some one is killed, don't scream until I tell you."

"Suppose you are killed?" asked the child.

"Never mind; do not move or speak, even if I am killed, unless I speak to you."

The child ran back in the hall, and Sleuth started to ascend the stairs, but he did not do so until his wonderful instincts informed him that a man was but a few steps above him. The latter had come to a halt, and Sleuth banged right into him, and at once there followed a series of oaths and curses, and a struggle, for Sleuth had seized the man, or rather the two men had made a joint attack.

The detective was a man of giant strength. He was yet under fifty, and his thews and sinews were as firm and elastic as when he was but twenty. He was up to every trick in wrestling and sparring. Old Sleuth was an expert in every art, and at that moment hard to match either mentally or physically in the way of his singular peculiarities.

The detective got the best grip and dragged the man down the stairs, and together they reeled through the doorway to the road-way of the court, and then the stranger exclaimed:

"Let go of me! What the — are you clinching with me for? Let go, I say, or I'll hurt you!"

"What did you catch hold of me for?" said Sleuth, as he backed the man toward the entrance to the court.

"It was you who clutched me," said the man.

"No, you got at me first," said Sleuth; and he kept backing the man toward the main sidewalk.

"Let go, I say!" cried the man.

"Yes, I will."

Sleuth had backed the fellow to the street and had him under the street-lamp, and managed to get a good square look at his face.

"Will you let go?" said the man.

"Certainly I'll let go."

Sleuth did let go his hold of the man, and at the same time asked him:

"What were you doing in that house?"

"What is that to you?"

"I am the agent of that property. I was going to call on one of my tenants when you grasped me by the throat."

"It's all right," said the man. "I was looking for a friend of mine whom I thought lived there."

"Oh, is that all? Well, all's well that ends well; but you're lucky."

"It's you who are lucky," retorted the man as he walked away.

Old Sleuth returned back to the entrance to the old house, and an instant later was again confronted by the little girl.

CHAPTER III.

SLEUTH always had a purpose when he made a move, and at the time he backed the man out to the street-lamp he had a design. As usual he desired to get a good square look at the fellow's face, and when the detective once got those terrible eyes of his fixed on a face the features were indelibly photographed upon his memory. He would know that man years afterward, and if he wanted him he would find him.

As described, after a good look at the fellow, he let him go and returned to where the little girl stood, and the latter at once exclaimed:

"That was one of them."

"Eh! what do you mean?" demanded Sleuth.

"You will understand when sister explains all to you; but we must hurry upstairs."

"Why didn't you go up before?"

"Oh, I was afraid to go! What will I do if sister is dead?"

"We will see," said Sleuth, and he followed the little girl up the stairs.

The latter was accustomed to ascending the rickety stairs, and besides, she was very eager, and she ran up ahead of the detective. A moment later there came a shrill scream, and the little girl, with a lamp in her hand, ran to the stairs, shouting:

"She's dead! She's dead! They've murdered her!"

Sleuth went up with a bound, and into the room on the top floor, the door of which was open, and there upon the floor, clearly revealed although in but a dim light, lay the form of a young girl.

"She's dead! She's dead!" murmured the little guide.

"Hold on and we will see," said Sleuth.

He caught the lamp from the child's hand and advanced and knelt over the prostrate form lying upon the floor.

One glance was sufficient. He saw that the young lady had only fainted, and he ordered his little guide to bring him some water. He applied the cooling liquid to the girl's brow, and kneeling down close to her face, holding the lamp so as to clearly see her features, he made a most strange and singular discovery.

The prostrate girl was plainly dressed, and looked like a very plain person, save that she possessed singularly regular features. Her complexion was "horrid," as the girls say; but the detective, upon a closer examination, made a startling discovery. He saw at a glance that the girl was *disguised*, and at the same instant he reached the conclusion that in fact she was very beautiful.

Sleuth continued his efforts to restore the disguised lady to consciousness. At length he had the satisfaction of seeing her move her lips and murmur, feebly:

"Maggie—Maggie!"

"She is not dead; she is calling me!" cried the little guide.

"Are you Maggie?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what is your sister's name?"

"Gussie."

After continued efforts on the part of the detective, Gussie opened her eyes. Sleuth had seen that she was about recovering, and he started up from beside her and caused Maggie to kneel in his place, and when the young lady's eyes opened fully they rested upon her little sister.

"Is it you, darling?"

"Yes, sister, I am here."

"Oh, Maggie, that man was here."

"Did he come?"

"Yes. You need not fear, sister. He has gone away, and Sleuth is here—Sleuth, the great detective."

Gussie raised up and exclaimed:

"What do you mean, Maggie?"

"You must not scold me, sister; but I brought him here."

"Brought who?"

"Sleuth, the great detective."

"Why did you bring any one here?"

"He will save you; he will not let the man kill you."

At that moment the girl's eyes fell upon the officer, and the color reddened her face, as she said:

"Maggie had no business to trouble you to come here."

In that kindly and reassuring voice which the great detective could assume when occasion required, he said:

"That is all right, my poor child; I wanted to come; your little sister is not to blame. Now come, sit up and tell me all about it."

Gussie did rise, with her little sister's assistance, and seated herself in a chair, but she did not speak, she merely looked around in a dazed sort of way.

"Come," said the detective, "tell me all about it."

"What shall I tell you, sir?"

Sleuth was a very cunning man, as our readers know, and he well knew how to get around to an object when he had a purpose in view, and he said:

"Do you know we found you lying insensible upon the floor?"

"Oh, I was so frightened!" cried the girl, involuntarily.

"What frightened you?" asked Sleuth.

The young girl cast down her head and appeared reluctant to speak, when Sleuth said:

"Come, do not fear, tell me what frightened you; I am your friend."

"You are a stranger to me, sir, and if Maggie asked you to come here she had no right to do so."

"It is well Maggie did ask me to come, for I met an evil fellow on the stairs, and we do not know what his purpose might have been."

"You did meet him?"

"Yes."

"Then I was not deceived," cried the girl. "I did see a face."

"Certainly you did; and now, tell me all about it, my child."

Sleuth spoke in a very kindly tone, and the girl said:

"I was sitting here alone when suddenly the door opened, and I looked over just in time to see the face of a man, and the next moment I knew nothing. If you met a man on the stairs I must have seen him."

"Why did you doubt having seen a man?"

"I have been so nervous lately. When I recovered, and when you asked me what had happened I thought that possibly my imagination had played me a trick."

"No; you undoubtedly saw the man's face, and Maggie and I heard you scream; and now, my dear child, you must tell me all about it—tell me why you feared this man; indeed, tell me your history."

"I feared him because I was alone in the house."

"No, no; you must not deceive me. You must tell me all, tell me the truth, for I know you have a reason for fearing the presence of this man. My child, you must confide in me."

The girl sat still, and did not answer.

CHAPTER IV.

"My child," said the detective, after waiting a moment, "you may as well tell me the truth; tell me all, for I know you have a revelation to make, and it may be that if you refuse to confide in me, you may, when it is too late, regret your lack of confidence."

"Tell him all, Gussie, and he will not let the bad men kill you."

The girl gave a start, and Sleuth quickly said:

"You hear. Maggie admits you have a revelation to make."

"I must have time to think, sir."

"No; you must tell me now; tell me all. Listen, I will tell you what I know. Maggie is not your sister."

Sleuth was a keen reader of physiognomies, and he had discovered that Maggie and Gussie were not sisters.

"No, Maggie is not my real sister, but I love her as much as though she were."

"How long has Maggie lived with you as your sister?"

"For three years."

"Come, tell me how you came to adopt Maggie as your sister."

The detective felt satisfied that if he could get the girl to tell her own story, he would succeed in gaining her full confidence.

"I do not like to tell the tale," said Gussie.

"Let me tell him all about it," cried Maggie.

"Yes," said Sleuth; "let Maggie tell me all about it."

There was great magnetism in Sleuth's presence. He had a wonderful way of winning confidences, and he was such a great, good-hearted man he inspired respect and trust almost immediately.

"Shall I tell him?" asked Gussie.

"Yes," answered Maggie, "tell him all. He will be your friend, and will not let the men hurt you, and he will find the treasure, and find out all about what the burglars were talking about, and he will see that the man who follows you does not follow you any more."

"Hush, Maggie!" cried the elder girl, in a terrified tone.

"No; I will not hush, Gussie. If you do not tell Sleuth all, I will tell him."

Sleuth desired to work toward the revelation gradually, and he said:

"Just tell me about your first meeting with Maggie."

The girl, who possessed a rich voice and a very charming manner, despite her seeming indigence, hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I was returning from work one cold, bitter winter's night when a little child, blue with the cold, in a feeble and pleading voice ran to me, and said:

"Come to my mamma. She is dying!"

"I did not hesitate a moment, but followed the child to a tenement-house, and I was led up several flights of stairs until ushered finally into a room on the top floor. On a miserable bed lay a woman evidently dying—yes, she was in the last stages of consumption—but she had strength enough to speak when I reached her bedside. She told me she was the widow of a soldier, that she had been cheated out of her pension by a man in whom she had confided. She said I would find some papers under her pillow, and she asked me to see that her child was put in some orphan asylum. She had but strength enough to give me some other directions and reveal to me a few other facts when she died. Poor little Maggie! her heart was broken, and I sought to console the child as best I could, when she threw her arms around my neck, and cried:

"Take me to your home; let me be your little child."

"In an instant I decided. I was myself an orphan; I had lived a lonely life; I determined to make a companion of Maggie, and I said to her:

"You shall be my sister," and ever since that time she has lived with me, and we call each other sister. She is a brave, good child, and I love her as dearly as though she really were my sister. I paid the expenses of her mother's funeral, and I have been amply repaid in holding the dear child's love. That is all, sir."

"I am very much obliged to you for telling me this story, and now tell me something about yourself."

"I have nothing to tell, sir."

"Ah, but Maggie has betrayed you."

"Maggie has a very lively imagination, sir. She imagines I am a great lady in disguise; but, sir, I am only a poor girl, born of humble parents—an orphan—left to earn my own subsistence by daily labor."

"I do not see why you refuse to have confidence in me."

"I have confided in you, sir. I can see you are a kindly gentleman, but I fear Maggie has unwittingly imposed upon you. Surely, sir, I have nothing to tell you."

"My child, listen to me. I am a detective. I have had great experience. I am not now in active employment, but I still enjoy doing detective work, and I do it without pay. Now listen. I may be of service to you if you will confide in me, and the service will not cost you anything. You need not fear me. I am an old man and well known indeed. I have a great reputation."

"I have heard about you, sir."

"Then you know you can trust me."

"But, sir, I have nothing to tell."

"I am disappointed," said Sleuth. "I had hoped you were a truthful young lady."

"I am, sir."

"And yet you tell me you have no revelation to make?"

"I have not, sir."

"My child, you compel me to tell you something. I do not do so with the purpose of annoying or alarming you, but you have a secret; I know it. There is a mystery connected with you—that I know also."

"As I said, sir, you have been misled by remarks made by Maggie, and her statements are founded upon creations of her own imagination."

"I know better," said the detective, in a decided tone.

The girl gave a start, and Sleuth added:

"I met a man on the stairway; I had a struggle with that man; I saw his face; it was the face of a villain. What was that man doing here?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Then why did his presence cause you to swoon away?"

"I am alone in this house, sir. The other tenants moved away a week ago. I intend to move away as the house is to be torn down. My month expires in three days, and the I shall move. It frightened me to see the man, and alone in the house."

"Very good; but now listen, miss. I still claim that you are withholding a revelation from me."

"Why do you so insist, sir?"

"Because you are disguised!" came the startling answer.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the detective uttered the words "You are disguised," the young lady gave a start; indeed, for a moment the detective feared she was about to go off in another fainting spell, and he hastened to reassure her, saying:

"You need not fear, I assure you. I am your friend, and it is fortunate this child brought me, for I am convinced a great peril threatens you, and why should you not trust me? I repeat, I am your friend."

"I never saw you until to-night, sir."

"I know that."

"Why should you be my friend?"

"I will tell you. I have had great experience. I know this world is full of crime and criminals; indeed, the true state of society is appalling to one who knows all that I do. I can not stop the great tide of evil that sweeps onward, but here and there I can snatch some poor innocent victim from the black, whirling current. I believe you to be an innocent girl. I believe danger threatens you—I believe evil persons meditate doing you harm. It will be a great pleasure to rescue you, and be of any other service that I can. You are not the first young person I have aided, and those whom I have protected heretofore were strangers to me, as you are, when I set out to do them a service."

The detective's words evidently made a deep impression upon the girl, and, after a moment's reflection, she said:

"Why do you suspect I am disguised?"

"I know you are."

"How did you discover it, sir?"

"It matters not how I discovered the fact; I am accustomed to such discoveries, however, and let me tell you your disguise takes the form of a disfigurement of your face. Will you tell me why you resorted to such an expedient?"

The girl did not answer, and the detective continued:

"Do not think me offensive, but you are a very good-looking young lady, or you would be if it were not for your voluntary disfigurement."

"I am a working-girl, sir."

"Yes, so I understand. Where do you work?"

"I am a lady compositor."

"And you have found it necessary to conceal your good looks?"

The girl again appeared lost in thought a few moments, and when she broke silence she spoke in a slow and hesitating manner.

"If you insist, sir, I will tell you my story."

"Yes; tell me your story."

"It is a terrible tale, sir."

"Tell me the story."

"My name is Augusta Thatford. My father lived in a lonely hut near the beach, down on Long Island. He pretended to be a fisherman, but I never knew him to apply himself to his occupation, and yet he appeared to have plenty of money. I recall this now, although I was but

seven years of age when the tragedy occurred which made me an orphan."

"Had you no mother?" demanded Sleuth.

"I never saw my mother, sir."

"Well, proceed."

"My father was certainly a man educated above his condition in life, for he devoted a great deal of time in instructing me and at the age of seven I was singularly well educated; I could read and write."

"Such precociousness is not of uncommon occurrence," said Sleuth. "I have frequently met children who could read and write at seven and eight."

"Yes, sir."

"Continue your narrative," said the detective.

"As I said, my father lived alone. There was no other residence within several miles of our hut, but I was very happy, however, with my father, as companion."

"Do you recall or remember whether your father was an American?"

"I think he was an American, as I recall a memory of him to-day."

"Proceed."

"My father often spoke as though he expected some one to come to him from over the sea. I did not pay much attention to the fact at the time, but within a few days I have had occasion to remember the incident; but the party never came, and who it was he expected I do not know."

"But you suspect?"

"I will first tell you my strange story, and then speak of what I suspect."

"Proceed."

"One night my father appeared to be very nervous and anxious. I remember it well, as I came to him several times to kiss him after starting for my little bed, and that was the last time I ever saw him alive."

The detective was deeply interested, and the girl, proceeding, said:

"I do not know what hour of the night it was I heard a voice at my bedside, but upon opening my eyes I saw a man standing over me with a mask on his face. I screamed, I remember also, when the man placed his hand over my mouth and bid me be still or he would strangle me. I was terrified, and dared not scream again; and the man, who held a light in his hand, said:

"Get up, little girl, and dress yourself, something terrible has happened."

"The man placed the light on the table and left my room, and I got out of bed and commenced putting on my clothes. I seemed to be in a dream, and yet I vividly remember all that occurred on that fearful night."

"As soon as I was dressed the man entered the room and led me out, and as I glanced around our little sitting-room I saw my father lying on the floor. His eyes were starting from his head, his hands were uplifted and clinched, his face was ghastly white, and he lay motionless. I shall never forget that sight as long as I live."

"Did you know your father was dead?"

"I seemed to have an instinctive idea of the truth, and I would have gone to him, but the man in the mask led me across the room and through the door. It was a cold, rainy night, I remember, and I was wrapped in a blanket by a man who stood outside. He raised me in his arms and carried me along toward an inlet that ran in from the sea. The man did not speak. I was carried to a boat, which was moored to the shore in the creek. There were two men in the boat, and the man who had carried me said to them:

"Keep her until I return," and I heard him whisper: "Be careful what you say. She is a very bright child, and may repeat all she hears."

"I do not know how long a time passed, but ere the morning light broke two men came to the boat. They carried with them a trunk, which was put in the boat. I had never seen the trunk before. As soon as the trunk was put in the boat the men rowed out to the sea, which was about a mile from where the boat had been moored, and soon the boat was run alongside a large vessel. I was lifted on to the deck, and taken to the cabin, and that is all I saw that night. The next morning when I was led on deck the vessel was far out on the sea, and—"

The girl's narrative was interrupted at this moment by the sound of footsteps outside the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE moment the detective heard the step outside the door, he raised his hand warningly to the girl, and at the same moment quickly extinguished the lamp.

"Do not move," he said in a whisper; and quick as a flash he drew his ever-ready dark-lantern, and sliding the mask, flashed the light on a mere boy, who cowered at the foot of the steps.

"Halloo! What are you doing here?" demanded the detective.

"Nothing, sir."

"You were upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing up there?"

"I was going to bunk up there till morning, sir."

"Well, you clear away with you; and if I catch you around here again I will hand you over to the police."

The boy darted away, and the detective was satisfied the little would-be bunker had told the truth. He returned upstairs, relighted the lamp, and reassured the two girls, telling them it was only a lad who thought the house was unoccupied, and then he said to Gussie:

"Proceed with your narrative; I am deeply interested."

Resuming her narrative, the girl said:

"Breakfast was given me, and the man who claimed to be captain of the vessel commenced asking me a great many questions, and then he told me that he was an old shipmate of my father's, and he said he had received a letter from my father asking him to come to him, as he desired to 'place his daughter in my charge. Your father,' added the man, 'must have known he was going to die.'

"Is my father dead?" I asked.

"Yes. I found your father dead when I got there. He must have died in a fit. So all I could do was to take you in charge, and I will adopt you, as I thought a great deal of your father."

"I was too young to question or doubt the man's story; and he was very kind to me; indeed, he appeared to have learned to love me from the very start. The vessel sailed away over the sea. At first I was very sad, but I was so kindly treated, and so very young, I soon became resigned to my fate. I believed the story that had been told to me; I believed the man was really my father's friend, and his having said my father had died in a fit explained what I had seen as I passed through our little sitting-room on that terrible night."

"But how about the masked man, who stood beside your bed and awoke you that night?" asked Sleuth.

"I once asked my adopted father about that man in the mask, and he laughed and told me I was deceived, having just been awakened out of a sleep. He said there was no man in a mask that night."

"And you believed him?"

"Certainly. I was but a child, between seven and eight years of age, and, as I have said, I was kindly treated, and the man had won my confidence. I learned to believe all he said to me. I do not know how many days passed at sea, but one morning I came on deck and found the vessel at anchor in a river, and later on I was taken ashore by the man who called himself my adopted father, and I remember how he brought me to a neat little house, and presented me to a woman whom he called wife, and when she asked who I was and where I came from he took her to one side and talked to her. I did not hear what he said, but afterward she came to me, kissed me, and said I was her little daughter."

"Was she kind to you?"

"Yes, sir, as long as she lived she was like a mother to me, and my adopted father was very kind. The old trunk I had seen put in the boat on that fatal night I afterward saw up in the garret of the house, and one day I raised the lid and peeped in and saw that it was full of clothing and papers and little boxes; indeed it contained quite an assortment of curious things."

"Where is that trunk now?"

"I do not know; but I wish I had possession of those papers, for as I have told you so much I will also relate an extraordinary revelation that has come to me through Maggie."

"When I was twelve years of age my adopted mother died," continued Gussie, "and my adopted father appeared to mourn for her very much; but ere her death a very

strange incident occurred. She was sick a long time, and I was never allowed to be alone with her; but one afternoon I found the door of her room open. I looked in; there was no one there with her. She saw me from the bed and she beckoned me to enter the room. I did so, and she drew me down beside her on the bed and hurriedly whispered:

"Come and see me some time, Gussie. I have something to tell you; and when I am dead run away from your father, and—" She could not say more, as at that moment my adopted father came into the room. He spoke angrily to his wife as he bore me away in his arms. A few months after my adopted mother's death, my adopted father took me to the city of Philadelphia and placed me in an orphan asylum, and I have never seen him since."

"You have never seen him since?" cried Sleuth.

"No, sir."

"How long ago was it that you were placed in the asylum?"

"I was nearly twelve years of age when I was placed there, and I am now nineteen."

"Well, well," muttered the detective, "this is indeed an extraordinary tale."

"I have still more wonderful incidents to relate," said the girl.

CHAPTER VII.

RESUMING her story, the youthful narrator said:

"I remained in the asylum for two years, and received excellent instruction. I think I was quick to learn, and my teachers took special interest in me, as I was educated far beyond the established standard in the asylum. At the age of fourteen it was announced to me that I was to be bound out to a gentleman who had visited the asylum and had seen me. The proposition filled me with terror. I had become quite a reader, and managed to get hold of books unknown to the matron, and I had learned a great deal from my readings. I resolved to run away and start in the world for myself, and I was aided by a young girl who was a maid in the asylum. She had formed a great friendship for me, and she loaned me money and clothes, and I agreed to correspond with her secretly if I succeeded in escaping."

"What has become of the girl who aided you to escape?" asked Sleuth.

"She is married now and lives in Philadelphia; and I still correspond with her."

"Proceed."

"When I escaped I came right on to New York, and I was very fortunate from the start. There was a lady on the train who had a little girl with her, and I took quite a fancy to the child and amused her during the trip. The lady made my acquaintance and asked me a great many questions, and I told her I was going to the city to secure a place as child's nurse. She asked me if I had references, and I showed her a reference my friend had given me, and the result was I assumed my friend's name and was engaged as the child's nurse. I remained with the lady two years, and during that time saved every penny of my money. Her husband was a printer, and when I told the lady I proposed to go away and learn a trade she repeated what I had said to her husband, and he proposed that I should learn to be a compositor. I learned very fast, and soon became quite an expert compositor."

"You are a very brave and deserving girl," said the detective.

"It was necessary that I should earn my living, and I did."

"Are you still in the shop with your friend?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you leave him?"

"I come to that now, sir. I kept my promise, and did furnish my address to my friend, who is now Mrs. Bland, and I corresponded with her for some months, when one day I received a letter from her, saying that there had been inquiries for me at the asylum. A man had come to the matron and had offered large sums of money to gain any information concerning me. The matron was suspicious, and led the man along until she could learn something about him. She employed a detective, and learned that the man who was seeking me was a notorious criminal, and she gave him no information. Mrs. Bland wrote to me to

be careful, for she had heard facts that led her to believe the man who was searching for me had an evil purpose."

"Did you ever see this man?"

"No, sir; but it appears that in some way he must have traced me up, for my employer one day called me into his office and asked me certain questions, and from his questions I learned that some one was on my track. I evaded all my friend's questions, and never appeared in his shop again. I left without any warning, and secured a position in another shop; and in order to hide from this man, whoever he may be, I disguised myself, and I have lived in tenement-houses, where I would be less likely to be discovered."

"Why have you hidden from this man?"

"I will tell you, sir. After I grew older I thought over a great many incidents in my early life, and I reached the conclusion that my poor old father was murdered on that fatal night when he was said to have died in a fit; and later on I procured proofs that he was really murdered."

"How?"

"In a most singular manner. One day I read in the paper about a crime that had been committed, and in the account it was stated that a similar crime was committed on the same spot some years previously, when old Thatford was most mysteriously murdered. I recognized the name, and as the papers stated the locality, I went down on Long Island to the place, and the place was familiar to me. The house was still standing where I had lived with my old father. I remembered the place well, and I made a great many inquiries and learned that old Thatford, as he was called, was found murdered one morning, and his child—a little girl—was carried away; and it was also stated and believed that my father was a miser and had a great deal of money in his possession, and that he was murdered for his money, as those around asserted. Indeed, I learned facts that fully convinced me that the traditions were partly true; and I was able, with what facts I had gained down near my old home, to make out quite a tragic series of incidents by adding other facts following the events of that terrible night."

"You are quite a detective," said Sleuth.

"I did not stop my detective work there," continued the girl. "I took a week's vacation, and visited my home down in New Jersey, where I had lived with my adopted father, and there I learned facts of the most startling character. I learned that the man who represented himself as the friend of my father was a bad character. His neighbors suspected him of being a smuggler, and it was stated that in his earlier years he had been a slave-trader; but all these facts were discovered after he had married a fisherman's daughter, born in the town by the sea-shore where this man came and settled. I learned that after his marriage he became very poor and laid around drunk all the time, but that suddenly one day he disappeared and was gone away two weeks, and when he returned he brought a little girl with him; that he from that time had plenty of money, and gave out that his brother had died, making him his heir and the guardian of his child. Later on it was said his wife died and he went away, and that after he had gone away rumors were rife that his wife had learned some terrible secret, that she was an honest woman, and that, fearing she would reveal his secret, he had poisoned her and had cleared out with the child, and had never been seen since."

CHAPTER VIII.

HAVING proceeded so far with her narrative as recorded to the close of our preceding chapter, the narrator suddenly stopped short and looked around in a furtive manner.

"I heard a noise," she said.

"Oh, it's nothing," said the detective; "only a rat. I've heard the noise for some time. Proceed with your strange story."

After a moment the girl resumed, and said:

"As I proceeded in my investigations I was enabled to supply facts to facts, and managed to make out quite a well-connected narrative of a dark and terrible crime."

"Do you think the man who is searching for you is the man who proclaimed himself your adopted father?"

"No; he is not the man. I always thought he was the man, but within a few hours I have learned the contrary."

"Have you established the identity of the man who is pursuing you?"

"I have not established his identity, but I have learned enough to establish the fact that the man who is on my track is not the man who committed the murder. The man who claimed me as his adopted daughter I have reason to believe is dead."

"You believe he is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you learned those facts before you were questioned by your employer with whom you learned your trade?"

"Yes, sir; and that is the reason why I fled away and went into hiding."

"But you found Maggie three years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"At that time you were living with your employer?"

"No, sir; I only resided with him six months after I had commenced learning my trade. When I adopted Maggie as my sister I set up in rooms by myself."

"Ah, I see," said the detective; "and now proceed."

"Last night there was a meeting between three burglars down-stairs."

"A meeting between three burglars?" exclaimed the detective.

"Yes, sir; and little Maggie here proved herself to be a little heroine, and one of the bravest little girls in New York, and, strangely enough, my name was mixed up in the conversation between those three men."

"I am amazed," said Sleuth.

"You will be still more amazed, sir, when I tell my startling narrative and relate Maggie's thrilling experience; and I will add that those men confirmed the fact that the old man whom I believed to be my father was really murdered."

"Then old Thatford was not your father?"

"I always believed him to be my father until Maggie overheard the talk between the three burglars."

"Proceed; I am impatient to learn the facts."

The girl was about to proceed when suddenly the door of the room opened, a man stepped over the threshold, and in a rough voice he asked:

"Where are the people who used to live on the floor below?"

Sleuth was surprised. The man had evidently ascended the stairs and had reached the room without having been heard, and how much he had overheard was a question.

The fact was, Sleuth had been so deeply interested in the narrative of Gussie, and she had been so absorbed in the telling of her story, neither had heard a step.

Sleuth glanced at the man and discerned instantly that his question was a "guy."

"Are you looking for the family who used to live down-stairs?" asked the detective.

"Yes, I am."

"Which family do you wish to find?" asked the detective.

"The family that used to live in the rooms below, I said. Is not that plain enough?"

"You need not get so huffy about it," said Sleuth.

Our hero had the appearance of a poor old man. He had assumed that as a disguise when he worked his transform before reaching the tenement-house under Maggie's guidance.

"This is the third time I'm telling you I want to find the family that used to live on the floor below."

"What family?" persisted Sleuth.

The man looked confused, but said:

"Hang it! can't you understand English?"

"Yes."

"Well, there used to live a family on the floor below, didn't there?"

"Yes."

"That's the family I want to find."

"Which one?" again asked Sleuth.

"You're guying me."

"No, I am not. Now see here; what is the name of the family you want to find?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"There were two families. How can we tell which one you want to find?"

"See here, old man, it's my idea that you're very insulting."

"Well."

"I don't like the way you talk. What are you doing here anyhow?"

"Is that your business?"

"Yes, it is."

As the man spoke he made a step toward Sleuth, and glancing closely at Gussie at the same instant, he remarked: "I think I've seen you afore, young gal."

Gussie rose to her feet in terror, and would have run from the room, when Sleuth stepped forward, and seizing her arm, said:

"Wait, my child, I will turn this ruffian out."

CHAPTER IX.

THE great detective saw that the man was only foraging around. He was merely on an information "lay," seeking to pick up a few points for some one else.

"Sit down, my child," he continued, addressing Gussie, "and I will see what this man is up to. He will make his business known or 'git'—that's all."

There came an ugly grin to the man's face as he surveyed the seeming old man over and over, and he said, in a sneering tone:

"You're quite a protector of a fellow, ain't you?"

"I think you're drunk," said Sleuth, "and you've no business here."

"Ah! go long, or I'll h'ist you out of the room. You just 'git.' I've got some business with this 'ere gal, and it don't concern you. So you just run home to your old wife. 'Git,' I say, or I'll h'ist yer—yes, yes, I will."

The old-time smile came to Sleuth's face as he advanced toward the man, and said:

"You're drunk, I tell you."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

The man leaped forward and made an attempt to seize hold of the detective, when the latter shot his arm forward and the fellow went reeling. Sleuth did not appear to make the least effort. It was a short-arm thrust, but, as the boys say, it was a "stinger," and it knocked the ruffian clean over. The fellow quickly sprung to his feet, and a more amazed man never recovered from a sudden blow.

Sleuth had, for reasons, assumed the disguise of an old man. It was his favorite rôle; he could play it well, and it enabled him to work his plans as a rule, with greater nicety.

As stated, the ruffian was amazed. He had looked upon the detective as a feeble old fellow, whom he could thrust aside as he would a child, and, lo! he had himself been brushed aside as though he were a fly. The man for a moment did not speak; but at length he said:

"For an old fellow, you're a good 'un!"

"My friend," said the detective, "I don't think you have any business with me."

"Hang me if I ain't reached that conclusion myself!"

"You had better leave."

"I guess I will."

"Go!"

The man moved toward the door as the detective advanced a step toward him.

"I'm going," he said.

The fellow reached the door, backed out, and disappeared; and Sleuth, turning to Gussie, said:

"It seems that I am just in time, as my friend Phil Tremaine sometimes remarks."

"It is fortunate for me, sir, that you are here."

"What do those men want?"

"I do not know, but I fear they mean some evil to me."

"You have grounds for your suspicion?"

"Yes, sir."

"Proceed and tell me. Finish your narrative. You were telling me that Maggie overheard a conversation."

"It is a remarkable story, sir, and you may not believe it."

"I am prepared to believe a great deal after what you have told me."

"It is a tale of buried treasure."

"Indeed?"

"According to what Maggie overheard, the treasure belongs to me."

"We can judge of that when you tell me your story."

"Last night, sir," began the girl, "Maggie went to the store to make a purchase for me. As she was returning

she saw a light in the lower room. She knew the room had been vacated, as the house is to be torn down. Her curiosity was excited, and she stole around to the rear door and entered the room."

"She was a brave little girl," remarked Sleuth.

"Yes, sir; she showed great courage, as you will learn. Upon entering the room she beheld three men seated at a table, which had evidently been left in the room, and the men had made two benches, on which they sat. On the table was a candle, and the men were drinking from a bottle."

"What made Maggie think they were burglars?"

"From a remark that fell from the lips of one of them, who said:

"I tell you, boys, this is a big room, but it is getting too small for us. That last job of ours is making considerable noise, and the police are going to get down to work, and the first thing we know we'll be 'nipped.'"

"Maggie overheard them say that?"

"Yes."

There came a thoughtful look to Sleuth's face. He knew that several daring robberies had taken place, and the burglars in one instance had nearly killed a gentleman who had detected them in his house.

"Proceed with your story," said the detective, after a moment's thought.

"When Maggie heard the man speak the words I have repeated she became alarmed. She at once concluded that they were burglars, and she was about to crawl out of the room, when she overheard a remark that caused her to remain, as one of the men said:

"I tell you, lads, if I could find a certain gal named Gussie Thatford I'd give you all a fortune, and we could retire from business."

"They mentioned your name?" said Sleuth.

"Yes, sir; and when Maggie heard my name mentioned she was amazed, and determined at all hazards to remain and hear what more the man had to say, and her courage was rewarded by overhearing, as I have intimated, a remarkable narrative. The man who had mentioned my name continued and said:

"You remember the Thatford murder?" The two men nodded their heads affirmatively, and the burglar continued: "You remember the little girl?"

"One of the men said:

"I remember there was a little girl that was carried away that night. What became of her?"

"Old Seth Black took the gal," the man answered; and the other remarked:

"He was a sly old cuss; but he's chipped me in, I believe."

"Yes," answered the first speaker.

"And what about the gal—what became of her?"

"That's what we don't know; but I've been looking for the gal, and, between you and me, lads, I think I'm on her track. There was a gal escaped from an asylum in Philadelphia, and she took the name of one of the nurses. She came on to New York, and went to work as a child's nurse; and then she learned the printer's trade, and she has been living in New York ever since."

"But what has the gal who ran away from the asylum to do with Gussie Thatford?" asked one of the men.

"Ah!" answered the man who had started in to tell the narrative. "I've pretty good proof that the gal who ran away from the asylum and Gussie Thatford are one and the same."

"How was Maggie able to recollect all this conversation?" asked Sleuth.

"Maggie has a most excellent memory."

Turning to Maggie, the detective asked:

"Did you remember all that was said?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And did you see the men's faces?"

"I did."

"And will you know them when you see them again?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

"Proceed with your story," said Sleuth.

"I will not attempt to repeat word for word all that passed; I will just give the outlines of the burglar's narrative."

"Then he did explain just what he meant?"

"Yes, sir; and I will now tell you his story."

"Yes; proceed and tell me the burglar's story."

CHAPTER X.

To relieve our readers of any weariness, we will condense the strange story told by the burglar. From what he stated to his companions, Maggie was enabled to gather the following facts:

Old Thatford was a seaman; he had been a sailor from early boyhood, and had sailed the world over in various ships, and among his shipmates was a man named Seth Black. Twenty years previous to the opening of our narrative Seth Black and old Thatford were in the same ship. Thatford was mate of the vessel, and when the ship had been a few days at sea it was rumored that her cargo was principally treasure that had been accumulated by one of the passengers, an American, who had lived many years in Australia. It was at Melbourne that the passenger had come aboard, and there had been considerable mystery in the taking of the cargo.

The captain of the vessel was a brave and honorable man—a man who could keep his own counsel. The reputed owner of the treasure was a middle-aged man, who was reported to have lost his wife through death a few weeks previous to the sailing of the ship, and when he came aboard he brought an infant child, who was cared for by a nurse, an elderly woman well adapted to her duties.

When the vessel was a month out Thatford discovered that Seth Black had been among the crew and had induced the majority of them to join in a plan to mutiny and a conspiracy to murder the captain and the passengers—there being two of the latter besides the reputed owner of the treasure, and his child and the nurse. Thatford also learned that the men determined to murder all the officers of the ship except himself, the first mate. It was a boy on the ship who had learned of the conspiracy and who had reported the intended mutiny to the mate. When Thatford learned of the facts he at once went to the cabin and reported to the captain, and advised that immediate measures be taken to beat the scheme of the mutineers.

As events proved, Thatford's advice was the best. His prophecy proved correct, and the delay cost the captain, the passengers, and all the officers of the vessel, save Thatford, their lives.

Upon the night following the mate's discovery, the men suddenly rose in mutiny. A desperate fight followed, but the mutineers outnumbered the officers of the ship and the few men who were not in the conspiracy, and every man was murdered who was not with the assassins, and the latter were soon in possession of the ship.

For some strange reason the mate's life had been spared, as Black was fully capable of sailing the vessel; still, orders had been issued that he should not be killed. He was seized before the fight commenced, and bound and gagged, and when released Black was in command of the vessel.

The triumph of the mutineers, however, was but short-lived; for within two hours after the outbreak of the mutiny, and before the bodies of the victims had all been cast into the sea, a man-of-war was seen bearing down upon the ship. Indeed, a fog had prevailed, and the man-of-war was almost within hailing distance when discovered. The men were seized with a wild fear, and they took to the boats, every man of them, and pulled away from the ship.

Thatford had managed, in the confusion, to escape observation, and remained on the ship; and a few moments later the fog, which for a short time had cleared away, settled down again thick and impenetrable, and the man-of-war was lost to view. So also were the men who had run off in the boats, and the good ship sailed along with a crew of one man only. Night fell over the waters, and all Thatford could do was to stand at the helm of the little brig and let her sail. And so through the night she kept upon her way, with the solitary man aboard of her at the helm to keep her up steady as she glided along.

The day following the fog cleared, and, as good luck would have it, Thatford discovered a sail. His signal was seen, and the two vessels headed for each other.

Again good luck fell to the lot of Thatford, as a dead calm settled over the sea, and a boat was sent from the vessel he had met. Thatford was overjoyed to recognize in the man commanding the boat an old shipmate.

The men from the boat boarded the abandoned ship, and were welcomed by Thatford, who told his story.

He did not mention, however, the fact of the treasure being on the vessel. He merely told the story of the

mutiny, and the boat returned to the other ship, and the man reported all that he had learned from Thatford.

It was a remarkable tale, but there were evidences of its truth, and, after due consideration, the captain of the friendly ship determined to send a few men on board to navigate the brig, it being arranged that Thatford should act as captain.

The men were put on board, and the brig was headed for San Francisco, although her original destination had been direct to New York.

While the men were reporting to their captain, Thatford descended to the cabin of the brig, when he was attracted by the cry of a child, and then there flashed over his mind a recollection of the nurse and babe. He found the surviving passengers. The child was about eighteen months old. As it turned out, the terror and shock of the mutiny had brought on a brain attack, and when the nurse was found she was dying, and indeed while Thatford stood by her side she breathed her last, and the old seaman was left in charge of the infant.

Thatford was a kind-hearted man, and he determined to save the child's life, and at once fed the little orphan, and soon gladly saw it fall away to sleep.

The crew from the other vessel came aboard, and in due time the brig reached San Francisco, and news of its arrival was telegraphed to the New York consignees.

Thus far Maggie heard the strange narrative, but just as the burglar reached that part of his narrative, there came an interruption, and Maggie heard no more.

Old Sleuth had listened to the extraordinary story with a feeling of deep interest, and when the girl concluded her statement, he said:

"This is a wonderful story, and you must let me think it over."

CHAPTER XI.

SLEUTH sat for some time thinking over the strange story he had heard, but at length he said:

"I am astonished, as I said before, that a child like Maggie should be able to recollect all she heard."

"The incidents are so tragic," said Gussie, "I do not think it strange."

"You have told me all she heard?"

"Yes."

"Had the burglar concluded his story, or did the interruption cause him to postpone it?"

"I think the interruption caused him to postpone it, sir."

"He gave no intimation as to what became of the treasure?"

"No, sir."

"There is no positive proof that there was any treasure on the ship?"

"No, sir."

"But there is an indication," said Sleuth, "from the fact that old Thatford was murdered, and also from the fact that the men are looking for you."

"I have merely related to you what Maggie heard."

"Your name was mentioned?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if the burglar's narrative was a true one, the indications are that you are the child of the passenger who was the owner of the treasure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Seth Black was the name of the man who took care of you after the death of old Thatford?"

"Yes, sir."

"And old Thatford was the man whom you always supposed to be your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he was murdered?"

"There is no doubt of the fact that old Thatford was murdered."

"And Seth Black was the murderer?"

"I have every reason to believe that he was the murderer."

"He is dead?"

"So it is said."

"Has Maggie ever seen the man since who told the story?"

"No, sir."

Turning to the child, the detective asked:

"Would you know the man if you were to see him?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had a good look at him?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old a man do you think he is?"

"Less than fifty."

"Was the man who was in the room to-night one of the three men?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see the man with whom I had the scuffle when we first came here?"

"No, sir; I did not see his face."

"What was it caused the burglar to end his story so abruptly?"

"Another man came into the room."

"And from what you saw, they did not want him to hear the story?"

"That is what I think, sir."

"Did the men say anything that led you to think they knew your sister was in this house?"

"No, sir."

"And they had no suspicion of your presence?"

"No, sir."

"What did they say that leads you to think they meant to murder your sister?"

"The man who told the story, before commencing his narrative, said he would settle her if he found her."

Again the detective sat for some time lost in deep thought, and when he broke silence he said:

"My child, there is no doubt but these men, for some reason, intend to take your life."

Gussie shuddered, but made no answer; and the detective added:

"I propose to take up your case. I propose to solve this mystery. There may be something in the burglar's narrative, and there may not. I am inclined to think it was a true story he told, and it is possible that there is somewhere a large amount of hidden treasure that really belongs to you."

"I care not for the treasure," said the girl.

"You care not for the treasure?"

"No, sir."

"What do you care for, my child?"

"I do not fancy being pursued by these bad men."

"You need not fear these bad men. You are now under my care. I will see to it that these men do you no harm."

"You are very kind, sir, but I can not become a burden upon you. But you can do me a kind service."

"I can do you a kind service?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"I am determined to leave New York."

"Why will you leave New York?"

"To escape those men."

"Where will you go?"

"I have not decided."

"You fear they will find you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Listen, my child. They have a purpose in finding you."

"It so appears."

"And you have no desire to find the treasure?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"It would prove a useless search."

"I do not think so, my child. Listen to me. I am an old man and I have had a great deal of experience. There may be something in that man's narrative, or there may not be. I am determined to find out."

"How can you, sir?"

"Ah, that is a matter I must settle in the near future. In the meantime you must act under my advice until my investigations are concluded. If there is a fortune belonging to you somewhere, we will find it. If there is no fortune, then you can decide upon your course; but either way I am your friend, and you must follow my advice. I will take you to my home; there you will be safe while I am looking into this matter."

"I can not leave Maggie, sir."

"I do not mean that you shall leave Maggie. She is too good and brave a girl to be left. But just mark my

words. Suppose you do come into a fortune, how much you can do for Maggie!"

"Alas, sir! I do not believe there is a fortune. Whatever fortune there might be has already been secured by these men."

"That is possible; and yet there are some features in case that lead me to believe that possibly the bulk of the fortune is yet to be secured."

"You are very kind, sir, to take such an interest in my affairs, but I fear it will be time lost."

"Leave it all to me; I will take the responsibility," said Sleuth.

CHAPTER XII.

GUSSIE THATFORD was a brave, self-reliant girl, and until within a few hours she had not attached as much importance to the narrative Maggie overheard as its remarkable incidents warranted. She had thought the story over after it had been repeated to her by Maggie, and not for one moment did she look upon herself as an heiress; but the words of the detective made a deep impression upon her mind, and yet she did not feel that she could permit the officer to interest himself in her behalf; but when Old Sleuth proved so persistent, she was inclined to look favorably upon his proposition; still she felt induced to say:

"Suppose, sir, it shall prove time lost to you?"

"I am prepared to lose the time."

"Who will pay you for all the trouble?"

"I am not looking for pay; I do not need pay. I am deeply interested in this case; it may prove the greatest case of my life, and you must know I have been engaged in some very remarkable cases."

"I do not see, sir, where you will commence."

"No! It would be strange if you did; you are not a detective; but I know just where to commence, and in the first go Maggie shall be my aid. She shall identify the burglar who was telling the narrative. And now listen to me: You must remove to my house and let me place you under the care of my wife; and under my roof you will be safe."

"But, sir, I must have time to pack up my things if I am to go to your home."

The real truth is, Gussie, as she afterward confessed, had no intention of becoming an inmate of the great detective's home; but Sleuth, who was a man who could see very far ahead, was not the man to be baffled.

"You will turn your key in the door, and come with me," said Sleuth.

"But, sir!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, what is it?"

"You forget, sir."

"Forget what?"

"I am disguised."

"You admit it?"

"Yes, sir; and after all you know there is no need for me to offer an explanation."

"No, my dear child, there is no need for you to offer an explanation; and your being under a disguise is a fortunate circumstance."

"But what will your wife say, sir?"

"I will explain as far as is necessary to Mrs. Loveland."

"You will explain to whom, sir?"

"Ah, you do not know. I am known professionally as Mr. Sleuth; but Sleuth is only a name my old professional companions gave me years ago. And now come, we will go at once."

The girl hesitated and blushed, and the detective observed there was something she desired to say, and he encouraged her with the remark:

"Well, what is it?"

"I was thinking, sir—" Again the girl hesitated.

"Proceed."

"Would it not be well for me to remove the disguise?"

"Yes, it will be as well under all the circumstances."

"And there is one more thing I'd like to say, sir."

"Proceed."

"You will please remember that I am only acceding to your request in permitting you to take me to your home, and also in permitting you to interest yourself in my affairs."

"That is all right, my child; I fully understand."

"And further, sir: under no circumstances must I be separated from Maggie."

"There is no reason why you should be separated from Maggie."

"Will you wait for me, sir?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Sleuth, with a pleasant laugh as he started to leave the room.

The detective left the room. An hour passed ere the door opened and he was bidden to re-enter the room. As the detective obeyed and his eyes fell upon the transformed girl, an involuntary cry of astonishment fell from his lips.

When he had first entered the room he had beheld lying upon the floor what appeared to be a very common-looking female. As our readers will remember, he almost immediately detected that the girl was disguised, and that she was a better-looking young lady than she appeared; but he was not prepared for the apparition of beauty that met him as he re-entered the apartment, for before him appeared a really beautiful girl, neatly and becomingly dressed.

When the detective had somewhat recovered from his first feeling of surprise, he ejaculated:

"Well, I declare!"

"I am ready, sir," said the girl.

Maggie, also, had undergone a transform, and she was quite a presentable and pretty little lady in her plain but neat clothes.

"I am not surprised," said the detective, meditatively, "that you found it necessary to hide your beauty."

"We will not speak of it, sir."

"But listen to me: when did you first go under a disguise?"

"When I left the service of the gentleman with whom I learned my trade."

"Then he knows you as you appear now?"

"Yes, sir."

"But in the shop where you were last employed you are only known as you appeared when I first beheld you?"

"Yes, sir."

Again the detective indulged one of his thinking spells, but soon asked:

"Where is your key?"

"Here it is, sir."

"We will go. And now, my dear child, remember you are under my care. You are to follow my advice and trust all to me—never fearing, never doubting—and either way I will see that our meeting results in benefit and safety to you and Maggie."

The door was locked. The trio started forth.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUSSIE THATFORD was duly introduced to the detective's wife, a lovely lady, whose history is well known to those of our readers who read the narrative of the "Bay Ridge Mystery," published many years ago. All the circumstances were fully explained by the detective, and Gussie Thatford and Maggie were made to feel that they were indeed in the house of friends.

On the day following the incidents we have recorded, the great mystery solver and criminal trailer started out to strike a trail; and when Old Sleuth started "points" he generally "got there," as our readers well know.

The detective knew better than any man in New York the haunts and habits of the criminal classes, and he had reached the conclusion that the man with whom he had had the scuffle in the court where the old tenement stood was the burglar who had related the remarkable narrative to his companions. The detective at all hazards, determined to get upon the trail of this man. He had a long talk with Maggie, and had got the man's description, and it was from what Maggie said he arrived at the conclusion that he would enjoy a "run in" with the burglar narrator.

It was well on toward midday when the detective saw a man saunter down the court, at the end of which stood the old tenement, and the moment Sleuth's eyes fell on the fellow he muttered:

"There's my man!"

The detective had recognized the fellow as the man whose face he had "collared" under the gas-light, and as his game went down the court the detective followed him with his glance, until he saw the man go into the tenement.

Some time passed, and the man came forth, and Sleuth lay low, and the fellow passed close to the detective, lost in a brown study, and he muttered, when close to the officer:

"Hang it! I want to see that gal. It would prove strange if I were to stumble right on to her."

Again the detective mentally exclaimed:

"He's my man, by ginger!"

The man started down the street, and Sleuth followed at a safe distance until both had passed the corner of the intersecting street, when the detective whistled, as though signaling for a dog, and a little ragged girl answered the call instead of the dog.

"Do you see that man going down the street, Maggie?"

"That's him, sir."

"You are sure?"

"I can't mistake him—that's the man, sir."

"Have you seen any of the others?"

"No, sir; but that man was up to our room."

"Did he enter the old house?"

"Yes, sir; and he went up to our room and tried the door."

"How do you know?"

"I ran round to the house in the rear and I saw him through the window. You know there is a window at the end of the hall in the old house."

"And you saw him try the door?"

"I did."

"Did he attempt to force it?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that is all I want of you to-day, little girl. You go home, stay in the house, and say nothing to any one."

"Not to sister?"

"No, not to sister. I will make all explanations."

The child skipped away, and the detective started to follow the burglar story-teller. The latter walked very slowly, and when down near the river entered a low drinking-place; and a few moments later the detective also rolled into the place—we say rolled, for he had assumed the disguise of an old sailor—and, always up to his rôle, he struck the sea-dog's rolling gait.

The burglar had seated himself at a table, and had called for a drink, and the detective sat down at another table and, also calling for a drink, fixed his eyes on his man. Some minutes passed; the watched man became conscious that he was being pretty closely scanned, and he thought to throw off the other's gaze by flinging back a savage glance; but Old Sleuth just kept his eyes fixed on the fellow, until the latter exclaimed:

"Look here, old man, I reckon you'll know me when you see me again."

"That's what I want to do," came the answer.

"Well, you just take your glance off me, will you?"

"No."

The detective looked like a very old man, and his boldness was characteristic.

"What are you looking at me so sharply for, anyhow?" demanded the man.

"I ain't hurting you, am I?"

"Yes, you are."

"Hurting your feelings, I suppose."

"You annoy me."

"Sorry, but I can't help it."

The man's eyes began to brighten with anger, and his face reddened, as he asked:

"What are you looking at me for, anyhow; will you tell me?"

"No."

"Are you crazy?"

"A little."

"I should think you were."

"They call me crazy, my shipmates do—yes, sir; and sentimentally I may be, but when it comes to the business of the ship I'm there every time, and they know it."

"What ship are you on?"

"No ship now; I'm taking a vacation ashore."

"Where did you sail from last?"

"Liverpool; and now see here, shipmate, didn't you follow the sea once?"

"Yes, I did."

"I thought so."

"Well, what of it?"

"That's why I'm looking at you, that's all."

"You and I never met before."

"That may be so; but I think we have met, shipmate." Sleuth was playing an old-time game.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE man appeared to be greatly amazed, and suddenly he rose from his seat, crossed over to where the detective sat, fixed his eyes upon the pretended old sailor, and eying him closely and well, said, at length:

"No, sir, I never met you before—that settles it."

"Well, now, see here," said Sleuth; "you don't remember?"

"No, I never saw you."

"That's possible, but it don't change it."

"Don't change what?"

"The fact."

"What fact?"

"That I believe I've seen you before."

"You never saw me."

"That's possible; but, now, see here. I'm an old man. I've been around the world a great many times, and strange things have come to my knowledge. I've a wonderful memory, I have, and it strikes me that I've seen you before, although you've grown a good many years older. I'm a daisy, though, shipmate, in getting down on old faces."

"And you think you've seen me before?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"In Melbourne, nigh on to eighteen or nineteen years ago."

The man gave a start.

"You think you saw me in Melbourne, eh?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You were with an old shipmate of mine. I spoke to him, but not to you. I saw you, but may be you didn't look at me."

"What is the name of the man I was with?"

"Well, there you've kinder got me. You see, I'm all right on facts, faces, and incidents, but when it comes to remembering names I'm weak—yes, my memory goes back on me, and that's why I was looking at you so sharp. I'd an idea that by looking at you I might recall the name of my old shipmate, and I want to ask about him, as may be you've seen him since, for I've never seen him since that day but once."

"Can't you remember his name?"

"Let me see," said Sleuth, in a thoughtful manner. "A B C D E F—Oh, hang it! Sometimes I get names by going over the alphabet, but I can't somehow get on to the name of the man I saw in Melbourne."

"Was it Brown?" demanded the man.

"No, sir; it was not Brown, but I've got it now—you just gave me the clew—it's Black, that's what his name was—yes, Seth Black; and he was a good sailor."

"So you knew Seth Black?"

"Yes; and weren't you with him in Australia?"

"Yes, I was; but I do not remember being ashore with him; but it was a good many years ago. Do you remember the name of the vessel Black was attached to at the time?"

"No, I do not remember her name, but it strikes me it was a brig I heard him say."

"Did he ever tell you what became of the brig?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you anything that happened during that voyage?"

"Yes. But see here, what has become of Black?"

"He's dead."

Sleuth fell off seemingly into a fit of reflection, and his actions were perfect as intending to deceive. Indeed, he was playing his game well. He was a fine player when on a "lay." After a long reflection, as it appeared, the detective said:

"I could tell you some pretty tall tales about old Seth. We were on a slaver together."

Sleuth lowered his voice as he spoke. He had struck the slaver business at random on a mere chance, but, as it happened, he struck it well.

"I'd heard old Seth had been on a slaver," said the man.

"What may your name be?" asked Sleuth.

"My name is Bigelow."

"Bigelow," repeated Sleuth, reflectively. "I never heard it—no. But you were a friend of old Seth Black's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, give us your paw, old man; I'm glad to meet you. Let's grog it together, eh?"

Drinks were ordered for the two men, and Sleuth kept repeating, "So old Seth is dead. Well, well! I suppose it will be my turn some day. I tell you, Bigelow, Seth was a schemer. He was"—Sleuth lowered his voice to a whisper, and continued—"he was a great fellow. He always had it in his mind to mutiny. He wanted to command a ship; and, as he could run one, he always had it in his mind to take command, and once he came pretty near doing it. You see, he persuaded me to head the affair, but we never got the first blow struck, and it went through."

"You say that you saw Seth once?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see him?"

"In Philadelphia; and he had some wild scheme in his head then. But he was so drunk at the time I did not pay much attention to him. He was talking about some hidden treasure and other nonsense, and I did not pay much attention, you see, for he was always talking about hidden treasure and treasure-ships; and, you see, he was full of grog at the time, as I said."

"And he was talking to you about hidden treasure?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said he had got on to the secret at last, but he could not trust any one; but he knew he could trust me, and he wanted me to go in with him; and he gave me some papers which he said carried a chart of the place where the treasure was hid. Why, yes; hang it! he got off more nonsense than I ever heard him get off before, but, you see, I was used to it, and it made no impresssion upon me."

"He gave you some papers?" said the man Bigelow, in a nervous tone.

"Yes."

"Did you keep them?"

"Yes, I think I did."

"Did you ever look at them?"

"Look at them? No! What would I waste time on such nonsense for?"

Old Sleuth was, indeed, playing a wonderful game. It looked as though he were guided by some supernatural instinct that caused him thus to fabricate a tale; and as our narrative proceeds, our readers will learn how singularly and strangely he went right straight to the mark in his random shots.

"You say you have those papers?" said Bigelow.

"Yes; I've got 'em somewhere."

"Old man, may be you've struck a fortune!" came the startling announcement.

CHAPTER XV.

SLEUTH pretended at first to be greatly surprised, but after a moment he said, in an indifferent tone:

"Bah! I don't take much stock in anything old Seth Black said."

"Did he tell you anything of his adventures?"

"Well, yes; he did tell me a wild, harum-scarum story; but I knew the man, I tell you—he was a great blower, especially when full of grog."

"What's your name, old shipmate?" asked Bigelow.

"What's my name? Well, it's funny, but my name is Brown, Alec Brown; and our shipmates used to call us the firm of Black & Brown, and sometimes they called us the consignees."

"Will you take some more grog?"

"I reckon not. I can't stand grog as well as I used to when I was younger."

Bigelow looked around furtively, and then said:

"See here, Mr. Brown, if you will come along with me I will let you into a big secret."

"No need to go away from here. I'm comfortable, and I can't get around as handy as I used to when I was younger."

"I've got an important communication to make to you."

"Sail in, my port ear is open."

Bigelow reached over and whispered:

"Some one might hear what I've got to say. I have to talk loud, as I see you are a little deaf."

"Well, I am, but I don't like to own up to it. You see, it ain't pleasant to get old and know that one is losing his faculties."

"I want you to come with me."

"You won't go far?"

"No."

"All right. I'll scud along a little way with you, but I'm no land-lubber to walk much."

The two men left the saloon, and Bigelow led the way to Tompkins Park, and, selecting a seat in a remote corner, he said:

"I want you to tell me just what Seth Black told you."

"I thought you were going to tell me something?"

"So I will. But I want to commence my story where you leave off."

"You want to commence your story where I leave off?"

"Yes."

"I have no story to tell."

"But you met Black?"

"I did."

"And he told you a strange yarn?"

"Yes, he did; but hang it, old shipmate, it was too extraordinary a yarn to repeat!"

"You don't know about that. How are you fixed?"

"How do you mean?"

"What provision have you made against old age?"

"Do you mean what have I stored away in a bank locker for future comforts?"

"Yes."

"Not much."

"You expect to go to sea again?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't you rather settle down and live easy?"

"You mean to go to Sailors' Snug Harbor?"

"No, I don't."

"I'll have to do that or go to sea again. I've nothing to lay up on—no, sir. I've lived easy—always spent the money ashore I earned afloat."

"That's a failing with us sailor fellows."

"Yes, it is, you bet."

"I've an idea that you can be a rich man."

"I can be a rich man?"

"Yes."

The pretended old sailor laughed, and said:

"When I'm a rich man the crows will sing."

"You may be a rich man."

"Why, are you going to pass over a fortune to me?"

"I may."

"See here, mister, you're talking sort of queer. You may be like old Black—a romancer—and he could beat the world."

"If you had a few thousands you could use them, couldn't you?"

"Could I? Well, you just let go all your sails and sleep on the bowsprit if I couldn't. I'll tell you something, old man. I once had a sister—as good a gal as ever lived—who stood ready to welcome a sailor brother home from sea every trip. You see she was twenty years younger than I, and she married a sailor, and she had one daughter born to her. When her husband was lost at sea it broke her heart—good wife that she was—and she died, leaving a little blind orphan child. That child is now a young lady, and she's poor and helpless; and if I had just a few hundred, it would make me the happiest man on earth to lay the money in the lap of my blind niece, and say to her, 'Here, darling, is a little present from your old uncle.'"

"You can do that."

"I can?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are a strange fellow, and you are quite a joker, I see."

"How?"

"Raising the hopes of an old man. No, no! I will not take any more of your guff. I'm no landsman; but between you and me, it would have been better all round if I had put aside a dollar or two now and then, and I could have made one little, lonely, sad heart to beat with joy."

"You can yet."

"How, I'm asking you?"

"Old Black told you a story?"

"He did."

"Repeat it all to me."

"I tell you it was a wild, nonsensical tale. It was just like one of Black's usual stories, and he was full of grog."

"Tell me the story. No harm can come of it even if it was a romance."

"Well, let me see. He told me that he was on a ship—a brig—that carried a passenger from Australia, and this passenger had chartered the ship to carry his treasure to the United States. On the passage there arose a great storm, and the passengers and crew took to the boats, but old Black was down in the cabin and did not go off in the boats. The brig, however, outlived the storm, and after twenty hours he found himself alone on the vessel. Then there came a calm, and he went below and found that the ship really had treasure on board. He sailed through two days, and met another vessel, and they sent a crew on board, and he ran the vessel to California. But he said nothing about the treasure, and managed to get away with it, and in time transported it to New York, and he hid the treasure, expecting the owner might turn up some day; but the owner never turned up, and then he handed me some papers, and said there was a chart among them, and that if ever anything happened to him I could get the money. That's what he told me, but he was full of grog, you know, and he always imagined all kinds of things when he was full. It was a wild, unreasonable story, you see."

Bigelow listened with a great deal of interest to the old man's cunningly constructed tale.

Old Sleuth, as our readers will see, did indeed tell a cunning tale. He did not let on that Seth Black admitted a crime, and yet his tale was in a certain sense parallel with the real facts, and he had briefly run the parallel up to the time when the deeds occurred in the story to which Maggie had listened.

At length Bigelow asked:

"Did you ever look at those papers?"

"No."

"But you have them?"

"Yes," came the answer; "I have them, somewhere, I know."

CHAPTER XVI.

BIGELOW again devoted a few moments to thought. The man did not know just how to work his scheme. He was seeking to evolve out of his mind a plan; and after a time he said:

"I'd like to look over those papers."

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Well, Seth told me never to let any one see them. And if anything happens to you," said he, "destroy them."

"But you said Seth's story was all a big yarn."

"I know I did."

"Then what harm is there in showing the papers?"

"I promised."

"According to your idea they are like so much waste paper."

"I did not say what my idea was, shipmate."

"You said all that Seth told you was one of his big yarns."

"That is what I said," replied the detective, with a laugh.

"And did you mean it?"

"No."

Bigelow was taken all aback, and said:

"I don't understand you."

"I see you don't."

"You are called Crazy Brown?"

"Yes."

"I begin to think you are a little off."

"Well, may be I am."

As Sleuth spoke he laughed in his peculiar manner. The fact was that as the little game progressed its real finess developed more clearly.

"You told me surely you took no stock in the story?"

"I did."

"Then of what value can the papers be?"

"I'm playing for a lead."

"I don't understand."

Again Sleuth laughed, and said:

"I'm crazy, but no fool, do you see?"

"I am all at sea."

Again Sleuth indulged a laugh.

"Do you speak plainly, old man?"

"Seth Black gave me those papers."

"Yes."

"I told you I didn't take any stock in his story."

"You did."

"I'll explain."

"Do so."

"I didn't take any stock in the story, as he told the slaver business and the desertion of the ship by its officers, passengers, and crew, and all that nonsense. No, no, he should have known better than to attempt to crowd all that 'guff' down my throat."

Bigelow began to perceive something. He was getting on to the drift of the old sailor.

"I see," he said.

"What do you see?"

"What you meant when you said you didn't take any stock in his story."

"You see, Black was a born mutineer, and if he thought there was treasure on a ship, and could get enough men to join him, he would make all hands that went against him walk the plank. He was a bad man, Seth Black was."

"And you are a very strange man."

"Well, I suppose I am."

"You thought to deceive me."

"Did I?"

"Yes."

"Honest Injun! so I did!"

Bigelow's eyes opened as he ejaculated:

"What were you after?"

"Information."

"What information did you want?"

"I'll tell you; I recognized you when I came in here, and I said to myself, there is a man who knew Black, a man I reckon who sailed in the brig with him, a man who knows the true story, and I'll go for that chap and pump him."

"You are perfectly frank now."

"Yes, I am."

"What started you in to be so frank?"

"I've learned all I want to know."

"What have you learned?"

"That there is something in what Black told me, and I mean to get the treasure, for I'm convinced now there is some gold hidden somewhere, unless Black rooted it up before he died."

"May be you did."

"No, sir; that treasure lies buried yet."

"Then you think there is some treasure?"

"Yes."

"How many know about it?"

"Only two."

"You and I?"

"Yes."

"There won't be many to come in on a divide."

"No."

"So you really think there is treasure?"

"I know there is treasure."

"And do you know where it is?"

"No; but I am piping down to its hiding-place."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"Then may be you don't want a 'pard' in the game?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"How much you can contribute."

"You're playing cunning now."

"Yes, I am."

"All right; you run your game, I'll run mine, and whoever finds the gold first will own it all."

"We may work together."

"I do not know as I need a 'pard,'" said Sleuth.

Bigelow became uneasy.

"We might as well work in together. You have the chart."

"May be I have."

"You said you had not looked at it."

"Well, I don't mind what I say. I had a good bringing up when I was young, but going to sea made me careless; you know sailors are given to big yarns."

"And you think Seth Black told you one?"
 "Yes, I do."
 "He did."
 "Aha! you know he did, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "Were you on the ship with him?"
 "Yes."
 "And there was treasure?"
 "Yes."
 "Then there was some truth in what Seth told me?"
 "There was a good deal of truth in what he told you; but it was not all true."
 "I see."
 "Can you put your hands on those papers?"
 "I reckon I can."
 "Old man, let you and I go in together."
 "I'll find out first what you can contribute," said the disguised detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE detective got back on Bigelow, giving the man his own methods, and the latter was not slow to observe the "points" made on him.

"I can contribute something," he said.

"All right; show up, and we may go in together."

As our readers will observe, the detective could not have played a neater game. His great knowledge of human nature enabled him to make a straight move toward the king-row every time. He had skillfully driven Bigelow into a position that compelled the man to tell his tale—the true tale—to finish the story that had been partly overheard by Maggie, and he had made his approaches by the only possible successful methods.

"I hardly know what to do," said Bigelow, after a moment, in answer to Sleuth's last remark.

"You're so sly."

"That's so; but remember it's a play for big money."

"You admit you're sly."

"Certainly I do."

"And you've been working on this thing?"

"A little."

"Have you told me all Seth Black told you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Did he mention any localities?"

"Well, he did."

"Did Seth Black mention any names?"

"No."

"Did you ever know of a man named Thatford?"

"Did I? Well, you bet I did! And he was a shipmate of Black's."

"Did Black mention his name?"

"No."

"Did you know Thatford was on the same ship with him?"

The pretended old sailor seemed lost in deep thought, but at length he said:

"Thatford, although a friend of Black, was an entirely different man."

"How?"

"Thatford was not a man to go into any schemes, and I reckon he kept Black out of a good deal of mischief betimes."

"When Black was talking to you he did not mention Thatford's name?"

"No."

"And you did not know Thatford was on the brig?"

"I did not."

"As I told you, he was, and, knowing that fact, what do you think now of Black's story?"

"I doubt it all the more."

"You see, I've told you something."

"Not much."

"I can tell you more."

"I reckon you can."

"Black lied to you."

"That's no real news. I calculated he did."

"You say Black was a born mutineer?"

"Yes, he was."

"You're right."

"I begin to perceive," said the disguised Sleuth, who was inwardly chuckling, his remark having a double meaning. He said, "I begin to perceive," and what he was be-

ginning to perceive was the fact that he was about to get on to the real story."

"I can tell you something, as I said."

"May be you can help me."

"May be I can."

"Will you?"

"Possibly, yes; what is it you are after?"

"I'm after the true story."

"What true story?"

"You admit Black lied to me?"

"Yes."

"You know the real facts of the case?"

"What facts?"

"How he came into possession of the treasure."

"I am not sure he ever came into possession of it."

"I am," said Sleuth.

Bigelow gazed in amazement.

"You know he did?"

"I don't know it; but I suspect."

"If he ever got on to the hiding-place, you and I need look no further."

"Oh, yes!"

"Will you explain?"

"I'll tell you I believe, although he had the chart, he never found the treasure."

"But he gave you to understand he buried it?"

"Yes, and that is where he gave himself away, and led me to doubt his whole tale."

"It's strange he gave you the chart."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"He only loaned it to me."

"Ah, I see."

"I was to meet him, and return it to him; but I never saw him again. I never knew what became of him, and a week later I shipped aboard a vessel going to China."

"And you really have the papers?"

"Yes; I told you I had them."

"But you have admitted you have not told me the truth every time."

"So I did; but I have the papers, and we can get right down to business, if you will open up."

"Open up?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I will understand the papers better if I hear the true story of the brig."

"But, old man, you may be playing me."

"If you think so, keep your mouth shut. To tell you the truth, when I met you I was looking for another man, who I know was on the brig."

"What is his name?"

"There's where you've got me. If I knew his name I'd find him."

"And you met me accidentally?"

"Yes."

"And you want to hear the true story of the brig?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell it to you," came the answer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BIGELOW proceeded, and related all the incidents as they were overheard by Maggie up to the point where the vessel arrived in San Francisco, and from this point, or rather, beyond this point, the burglar and ex-seaman continued his narrative, and Sleuth was a delighted and triumphant listener, for he had played a most successful game to reach the recital.

Continuing the narrative after the arrival of the brig in San Francisco, Bigelow said:

"Old Thatford may have been honest, but he was a cunning old cuss."

"He was surely honest," said Sleuth.

"Well, I reckon he was too honest by half, and his honesty in the end cost him his life."

"Cost him his life?" exclaimed Sleuth.

"Yes."

"How?"

"Black murdered him."

"Black murdered old Thatford?"

"Yes."

"Why, they were fast friends."

"Yes; but you see Thatford went back on Black. But let me tell you all the facts."

"Go ahead."

"You see, as I said," continued Bigelow, "old Thatford was very cunning, and when the vessel reached San Francisco he managed to discharge the crew, finding money to pay them off, which he said was sent to him by telegraph from the owners in New York. And once alone in possession of the vessel, Thatford removed every ounce of the treasure, and then telegraphed to the owners in New York, and they did telegraph back for a San Francisco house to take charge of the vessel, and the cunning old Thatford turned over everything intact less the treasure."

"How did you learn all these facts?" asked Sleuth.

"We got on to a diary that the old fellow kept, after he was killed."

"Were you one of the mutineers?"

"No, but I pretended to go in with the gang, in order to save my life, as I knew every other man on board would be murdered."

"And you were one of the party that left in the boats?"

"Yes; I did not dare remain on board."

"How did you fellows escape?"

"We were picked up after two days by a vessel, and we told a story of shipwreck and were treated like heroes."

"But were you never recognized?"

"No; as we did not give the name of the brig, but the name of a vessel that we manufactured, and it was always supposed, and is to this day, that we all perished, because we did not return to New York until ten years later."

"Do you know of any of the others of the crew still living?"

"Yes, one."

"Where is he?"

"In New York here."

"And does he know any of the facts of the treasure?"

"Only what I told him."

"And have you told him all?"

"No."

"Go on with your story."

"It was ten years after the murders on the brig that I returned to New York."

"Did you return alone?"

"Yes, and almost the first man I met was Black, and he told me a wonderful story. He said that, some days previously, he had been in New York, when he met Thatford. The two men recognized each other and had a long talk, and Thatford ordered Black to leave the country, saying that, if he did not obey, information would be lodged against him."

"Thatford threatened him?"

"Yes."

"And Black did not heed the warning?"

"Yes, he did, but not in the way Thatford intended. You see, Black promised to leave the country, but instead he secretly followed Thatford and discovered that the old man was living in a fisherman's hut on the south shore of Long Island, and he also discovered that the old man had a little girl living with him who was supposed to be his daughter. But Black concluded that the girl was the daughter of the passenger who had owned the treasure and who had been killed in the massacre on the brig."

Old Sleuth's blood boiled as he listened to this terrible tale, but he managed to conceal his feelings, and listened attentively to a continuation of the startling narrative, and he said:

"His conclusion was correct?"

"Yes."

"The child really was the daughter of the passenger?"

"Yes."

"What became of the child?"

"She is still living."

"She is still living?" cried Sleuth.

"Yes."

"Then she is the real owner of the gold?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"No; I have been trying to find her."

"You have been trying to find her?"

"Yes."

"To tell her about the fortune?"

"Well, I might tell her," answered the man, with a cold smile upon his wicked face.

"What is the girl's name?" innocently asked Sleuth.

"She goes by the name of Blood, so I understand, and she had another name—Gussie Thatford."

"Go on with your narrative."

"Well, you see, as I said, I struck Black just after his meeting with Thatford, and he was in mortal terror; and he told me that I would be discovered, and that we would both hang; and he bid me come down to his home and see him."

"Did you go?"

"I did."

"Let's hear the rest of your yarn."

"I am going to tell you all; but first let me say that I had nothing to do with what followed. I am not a murderer, and I had no hand in the death of Thatford."

"Go on and tell me about Thatford's death," said Sleuth.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I WISH you to remember I had nothing to do with that affair."

"That's all right."

"You see, Black said to me that all he intended to do was to take Thatford a prisoner and hold him until he took an oath not to betray us, and it was with that understanding I went into the scheme. Black chartered a fishing-smack, and one night four of us went aboard, and we sailed to an inlet near the spot on the coast where old Thatford dwelt with the little girl."

"What did you say the little girl's real name was?" said Sleuth.

Bigelow permitted a strange light to suddenly gleam in his eyes, and for the first time evidently a suspicion flashed through his mind, and he said, in a fierce tone:

"You appear very anxious to learn the real name of the child?"

"Yes, I am anxious."

"Why?"

"Her name has considerable bearing upon the papers in my possession."

The answer was an inspiration, as it appeared to banish Bigelow's suspicions as suddenly as they had arisen.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I do not know the girl's real name; but you will find her real name when you look over those papers."

"Ah, yes; I reckon now I've an idea of her name, so go on with your story."

"Let me see, I reached the point where we sailed to the inlet?"

"Yes."

"Now, remember, I had no idea as to what was to occur, for had I known I would not have gone into the scheme, and had I learned later what his game was I would have protested."

"That's all right."

"Certainly, it is all right, for I am not a murderer."

"But didn't you take a hand in the fight on the brig?"

"No, sir; I only pretended to do so."

"Oh, you were very particular."

The disguised detective made the remark in a tantalizing tone.

"I don't care what you think," said Bigelow, "I am giving it to you straight."

"All right."

"Black had the bearings for Thatford's cottage, or cabin, and he led us straight forward, and we soon saw the glimmer of the light from the windows, and then Black ordered a halt, and he said:

"You fellows wait here. I will go forward and have a talk with the old man, and may be I can bring him around; if not I'll give you the signal and you fellows can come along, and we will make him a prisoner and take him on board the sloop."

"He went forward alone," continued Bigelow, "and we three fellows waited for the signal; and I reckon fully ten minutes passed. We heard no noise, no alarm of any kind until Black came out of the cabin and tipped us the signal, and then we went forward. I was the first one to enter the place. There was a light in the room, and a sight met my gaze, I tell you, that made my heart stand still."

Sleuth uttered an exclamation; it was a sort of running

comment and meant nothing, and the man Bigelow went right on with his narrative.

"Yes," continued the man; "it made my heart stand still. It was the most ghastly sight, under all the circumstances, my eyes ever gazed on. Yes, sir; on the floor lay old Thatford. I recognized him at a glance, although he was as dead as a door nail. He had evidently been strangled. As I looked upon him first, as I said, I uttered a cry, turned back, and saw Black standing by me. I shall never forget the expression of his face, as he said:

"I had to do it—yes, I had to do it. The old man showed fight. He went for me. I did it in self-defense."

"You lie, Black!" I said.

"The man flashed a terrible look out of his eyes upon me, and I thought to myself, 'Have a care, old man, or he will have to do it for you.'"

Bigelow rested a moment in his recital, and Sleuth asked:

"Were there any signs of a struggle?"

"No, sir, there was not."

"Then you do not believe there was a fight?"

"There was no fight. If there had been we would have heard something. No; it was not done in self-defense."

"It was a cold-blooded murder?"

"That's what it was, sure."

"Go on with your narrative."

"I may as well tell you now," resumed Bigelow, "that I had made an enemy of Black by my remark. Yes, he was dead against me from that time out."

"Did he harbor evil thoughts against you afterward?"

"Yes, he did; but I did not get on to his enmity until some time afterward."

"Why didn't you denounce him?"

"I wanted to get on to his secret."

"The secret of the buried treasure?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

"Well, sir, the man was dead, and that was all there was about it; and in a room off the main room we found a little girl in bed. One of the men said, 'Let's strangle her too.'"

"Let's strangle her too?" repeated Sleuth.

"Yes; that's what the man said," continued Bigelow.

"Then the other men were well into Black's confidence."

"How?"

"They knew he intended to murder Thatford."

"How did you know that?"

"One of them said, 'Let's strangle the child too?'"

"Ah, I see; I did not think of that before," and at the same instant another idea appeared to run through Bigelow's mind, or rather his original suspicion seemed to return, and he fixed a keen, searching glance on the detective. The latter, however, gave no sign, but said, as a misleader:

"It's lucky I held on to those papers, and I think you and I can make a big thing out of this affair; but go ahead with your narrative."

"There is not much more to tell. The child was not killed, but sent aboard the sloop. Black protested against any harm being done to her, and there followed a search of the cabin."

"What was found?" asked Sleuth.

"I'll tell you. Between you and I, it was in order to get rid of me that Black spared the child's life, leastwise that is my suspicion. I was sent with the child to the boat, and ordered to remain in care of her until the balance of the party joined me. So you see I was not present when the search was made. Later on, one of the men joined me, and we rowed out to the sloop with the girl, and he returned with the boat for the rest of the party."

"And did you let him go?"

"Yes; I was under Black's orders, and I did not dare protest."

"Didn't you learn afterward what was found?"

"I did; but it was a long time afterward—indeed, after Black's death."

"Go on and tell me what was found."

"In the first place, they found a big sum of ready money."

"And didn't you get your share?"

"No, sir, I did not. And they found a black trunk, and in that trunk was some papers, and among the papers was a diary kept by Thatford. And from that diary Black

learned all about the movements of Thatford after he had been deserted on the brig."

"And what became of those papers?"

"Some of them fell into our hands after Black's death, but one very important paper we never found."

"And what paper was that?" asked Sleuth.

"It was a chart giving the bearings as to where ten millions in gold is buried," came the answer.

CHAPTER XX.

OLD SLEUTH had worked down to a pretty clear statement, and he was in possession of certain facts previously obtained that enabled him to measure pretty accurately the statements of the man Bigelow, and when the latter said the chart indicated where ten millions in gold were buried, there came a peculiarly pleasant gleam to the detective's eyes.

"Ten millions in gold!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"How did you learn the amount?"

"Well we got on to it. You see, as I learned afterward, Black did get on to a good deal of money, and he gave all the men who were with him some but me. He just went cold on me."

"What became of the papers that were in the trunk?"

"I've got some of them, and they are divided around, but I reckon you've the valuable papers. You see it wasn't until after Black's death that we got on to a strange fact."

"And what was that?"

Bigelow did not answer immediately, but said:

"Are we in together?"

"How do you mean?"

"Have I given information enough to entitle me to form a partnership with you?"

"I don't see any reason why we should not go in together to hunt up this treasure."

"Well, I'll tell. The chart, as it turned out, was sewed up in the skirt of the child's dress, and that little paper is worth ten millions, and now the question is, did Black ever learn this secret and get the chart, or did he only learn the secret, and fail to get the chart?"

"Are you sure the story of the chart is not a misleader?"

"No, sir; that chart was hidden in the child's dress."

"How did you learn that fact?"

"After Black's death we made an excursion down to the house where he had lived and we made a search, and we came upon some papers. The old rascal had hidden them, but we found them, and among them was the diary. And then we found a letter of instructions. The letter was addressed to a lawyer."

"What was the name of the lawyer?"

"A fictitious name had been assumed by the lawyer."

"Possibly he knew the secret and has got the money."

"No, sir; it was evident that old Thatford feared some evil. He may have had a premonition of coming evil, and started in to write the letter. The letter was never finished and never delivered, and, from its character, it is evident the lawyer was not into the secret."

"How did you learn the name of the lawyer was fictitious?"

"We have hunted New York to find the lawyer."

"Who has that letter?"

"I've got it."

"By George!" cried Sleuth, "with the letters you have and the papers I've got, we'll get that money."

"It is possible Black got it and hid it a second time."

"No, Black never got it."

"How do you know?"

"Since you have been talking, I've put certain facts together, and I've reached certain conclusions."

"And you think Black never got the money?"

"He never got it."

"And haven't you the chart?"

"Well, I must look over my papers and see."

"Do you think the gal got the chart?" asked Bigelow.

"No," answered Sleuth, quickly.

Bigelow gave a start, and exclaimed:

"You appear to be pretty certain!"

"Yes, I am."

"Then you have seen the girl?"

"We won't say anything about that; but the girl did not get the chart."

"Then Black may have got it."
 "I don't think he did; but you and I will meet again."
 "Eh?"
 "We will meet again."
 "Are you going?"
 "Yes."
 "But see here, you've emptied me and you haven't given me anything."
 "Is that so?" yawned Sleuth.
 "That's so, dead sure."
 "But I've nothing to give you."
 "Those papers?"
 "They're all right."
 "And you're going?"
 "Yes; but you and I will meet again."
 "See here, shipmate, this ain't at all satisfactory to me."

"Is that so?"
 "I think you've played me."
 Bigelow, at length, had grown very suspicious, and with the suspicion there arose a feeling of anger in his heart. He stepped close to the detective, and, bending his lip to the latter's ear, said:
 "You meant to play me."
 "Go 'long—you're foolish!"
 "I tell you, old man, you've got to open up; you've pulled me clear out."
 "We'll meet again."
 "When?"
 "Oh, in good time."
 "You think you got all out of me?"
 "No."

"You didn't. The most important matter I kept back, and that is something concerning the gal."

Sleuth felt a twinge when it came to him that possibly he had not carried the game quite far enough, but then as quickly he remembered that he had secured a good deal to work on, and other developments would come in their turn.

In the meantime Bigelow's suspicions had become more keenly aroused. The wildest kind of fancies ran through his mind. The fellow felt that he had been played as mortal man had never been played before, and in his mind he had settled upon a certain plan; indeed, he mentally muttered:

"You think you've got me, old man. Well, we shall see."
 "I will go now," said Sleuth.
 "But you did not say when you would see me again?"
 "I will let you know."
 "You will let me know?"
 "Yes."
 "But how will you send me word?"
 "I'll find a way to send you word," said Sleuth, and started away, and from that point a great double strategic game commenced.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Sleuth separated from him, Bigelow stood a moment watching the retreating form of the pretended old sailor, and then there fell from his lips the muttered exclamation:

"I've been played!"
 As Sleuth walked away, strangely enough he muttered:
 "I played him well!"
 Bigelow thought he had been playing a good game. His game was what the brokers call a "future," and from his standpoint he had worked well; and had the facts been as he believed them to be at the time, his would have been a good game.

In the first place, Bigelow believed Sleuth was an old tar, the detective had acted the rôle so well, and then again Bigelow believed Sleuth possessed considerable knowledge as to what had occurred. We will go so far as to say that Bigelow did not believe he was giving the pretended sailor any new facts; his part was to let the supposed Brown believe that he was putting great confidence in him. Bigelow's confidence had an object. He was working on the old adage, confidence begets confidence, and as he saw Sleuth departing it came over him that he had been fooled, and he whipped himself accordingly.

If Bigelow had really through he was telling any new facts to the pretended sailor he would have been as dumb

as an oyster; but, as intimated, he though Sleuth was feigning ignorance, and availed himself of the chance to betray his own knowledge.

The real fact was Bigelow had never been on the brig, and he had come to a knowledge of all the facts through an acquaintance with an old sailor, who had told him the story in all its details, and Bigelow was assuming the rôle of the sailor, and that is why he told his tale so readily, believing Sleuth did have the papers. He desired to make himself solid with the old salt, secure the papers, and then—well, the chances are that, had Sleuth been what he pretended to be, his acquaintance with Bigelow would have led to his death in the end.

"Hang me for a fool!" again muttered Bigelow. "I believe that all I told that fellow was news to him. Now that I recall, I gave it all to him. He gave me nothing. Yes, I've been played; but I'll get square with Mr. Man, you bet!"

Sleuth continued on his way. He had a little scheme in his mind. He had ascertained just how Bigelow stood, and he wanted to get possession of that diary and other documents he had reason to believe Bigelow had in his possession. Armed with the papers, the detective was set to make a search for the buried treasure. He wanted to read that diary over. He had no hope of ever finding the chart; but when his well-trained mind once digested the papers, he calculated he could form some idea just how to go to work.

As stated, the detective kept on his way, and as he walked he also muttered:

"I think that fellow suspects me. The rôle of Brown is played out for the present. I must get at him under another cover."

Sleuth, as our old-time readers know, was acquainted with New York from one corner to the other. He knew every inch of the city, and just where every dive was located; indeed, he had things down finer, as far as New York is concerned, than any living man.

He kept on his way, and soon fell to a fact, and again he muttered:

"It is as I suspected—that fellow has his suspicions aroused, and he is trailing me. It is a case of the trailer trailed," added the detective, with a laugh, and a moment later he added still further, "I'll run him a good chase."

The detective at length reached a point toward which he had been forging, and he entered a saloon. The proprietor was a German, and as Sleuth entered he advanced to the man, and said:

"Halloo, Metzler!"
 "Eh! I vos not know you. Halloo!"
 The detective reached over and whispered in the man's ear:

"Sleuth."
 There came a startled look to the German's face and a change over his manner.

"Eh? Vot can I do?"
 "I'm trying to give a lad the shake."
 "Oh, yes; I see vot you vos up to now."

Quick as lightning the detective worked a transform. The sailor disappeared, and in his stead there stood a respectable-looking German-American citizen before Metzler's bar.

The transform was done so quickly that the owner of the place uttered an exclamation of amazement; but the fact was Sleuth had prepared himself to work a dozen changes if necessary. So great was his skill that he could have made a fortune on the stage as a change artist.

Having worked his transform, he stepped to a table, sat down, ordered his beer, and said, in German:

"I'm not here, remember."
 "Oh, yes; I get on to it," responded the German.

The words had hardly left Sleuth's lips when a man entered the place, and the detective did experience a start of surprise; but he had the advantage. Bigelow had also worked a good transform; but Sleuth went through the man's cover. Would Bigelow go through his little change?

As the burglar entered the place he let his eyes stray around the room, and, as it happened, there was no one in the barroom but the disguised detective and the keeper of the place.

Bigelow took a seat, ordered some refreshment, and, as the proprietor waited on him, he asked:

"Where is the other man?"

"Eh?" ejaculated the proprietor.

"Sit down here."

The landlord sat down, Sleuth pretended to be reading a German paper, and Bigelow continued, in a low tone:

"There was a customer just entered here ahead of me?"

"Yes," said the ready-witted German, "there were two or three customers in and out."

"In and out?"

"Yes."

"The last man who came in ahead of me did not go out?"

"No, I guess not."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. I can not remember who goes in and out—there are so many in the course of the day."

Bigelow nodded toward Sleuth, and asked:

"How long has that man been here?"

"Oh, dat was mine friendt. He was come in two hours ago. He generally stays half the day mit me."

"There was another man came in."

"I don't was see him."

Bigelow described Sleuth as he appeared under the cover of the old salt.

"Dat man was not in here," said the keeper of the place.

"Oh! may be he went in next door."

"Yes, he must haf done dat; he go in next door."

Bigelow finished his drink, and rising, went out, and the German, approaching Sleuth, said:

"Dat was der man?"

"Yes."

"Did I throw him off good?"

"Yes," answered Sleuth.

Sleuth said yes, but he well knew Bigelow had not been thrown off, and he muttered, mentally:

"That fellow is smart; I must look out; it will take nice work to fool him now."

The detective had reached the conclusion that Bigelow had not been deceived, and he could also perceive that the fellow had acted just right under all the circumstances; and Sleuth was correct.

Bigelow had not been deceived. He had not recognized the detective, but he had put certain facts together, and he had reached a conclusion.

CHAPTER XXII.

We have intimated that Bigelow reached a conclusion, and such is the fact, and the words he muttered after leaving Metzger's betrayed the truth. He said, in a low and a mocking soliloquy:

"Did my eyes deceive me? No, I do not let my eyes deceive me. I saw that man enter the saloon; I did not see him come out. There was but one man besides the keeper in the place. A live man in the flesh can not go through a solid wall. If the man did not come out, he must have stayed in; and if he did stay in, he must have been there when I entered; and as there was but one man in the place besides the keeper, as I said, he must be the man I am trailing. But, again, did my eyes deceive me? No, my eyes did not deceive me. And a change had come over the man. He was giving me the slip. He must have felt to the fact that I was following him. Good! That opens up a big game. I've been played. The man went under a transform, eh? What does it all mean? We shall see. I'll lay for him; I'll lay for Metzger's friend—that's what I'll do!"

Bigelow's little soliloquy justified Sleuth's conclusion that Bigelow was no fool; and, indeed, as the detective thought matters over, he began to discern how it was the fellow had been so confidential, and the detective muttered:

"Well, it's all the same; he gave me the information. I know that what he told me was pretty near the truth, and now the question is how to give him the 'shake' and then get on to him again."

Our readers have possibly discovered that Sleuth desired, as he said, to shake Bigelow. He wanted to shake him as Brown and get on to him again as somebody else.

The detective was sorry the man had fallen to his little transform business, for the detective was well satisfied the fellow was on to him in that direction.

Sleuth remained in the saloon fully three hours. There

was a bare chance that he might give Bigelow a "throw off."

At length he said to Metzger:

"Do you know a lad who can carry a message for me?"

"Yes; there is a lad comes in here sometimes."

"Cute?"

"Yes, sir; he's a dandy."

"Can you get word to him?"

"I'll see."

A few moments later a little girl entered the place to buy something, and the man Metzger whispered a few words to her in German, and she took her can and went out, and a few moments later a lad entered the place. He also carried a can. Sleuth called the boy over to him, asked him a few questions, and made up his mind that he was all right. He then gave him certain directions and the lad went out with his can, and an hour passed and then a man entered the place. The last comer glanced around, and Sleuth passed him a signal. The signal was answered, and the man took a seat at the table near the detective, and there followed a whispered conversation, and after a few moments the man left the saloon.

Half an hour passed, and another man entered the saloon. He did not wait for a signal, but went straight to Sleuth, and, sitting down, said:

"He is there!"

"You took a good look at him?"

"Yes."

"He's on the straight watch?"

"He is, sure."

"Let me see," muttered Sleuth, musingly; "we might arrest him and get him out of the way in that manner."

"I will do it if you say so."

"Not a good scheme."

Quite a number of men were now coming and going out of the place, as it was after six o'clock.

"I've got it," said Sleuth; "follow me."

The detective exchanged a few words with Metzger, and then led his friend out of the saloon. A few moments passed, and Sleuth and the man returned, and after a short interval they again left the place. Sleuth walked up the street, and the next minute, Bigelow dodged out of his hiding-place and started to dog the detective, and at the same instant the man who had come to Sleuth's aid uttered a laugh and the words:

"Aha! I've fooled him."

We will let our readers into the secret at once. The great detective had worked one of his marvelous games. When he and his pal, whom he had sent for by the lad, left the room, they worked a mutual transform. Sleuth got up as his pal, and his pal got into the disguise Sleuth had worn. So when it appeared that Sleuth left the saloon first it was not Sleuth, but his pal. And it was Sleuth who laid back and watched the game, and gave utterance to the exclamation, "I've fooled him at last!"

While the detective and his pal were making the transform, Sleuth let his man into the game, and gave him his directions, and so when the man Bigelow started to follow the supposed Sleuth it became a double shadow.

Bigelow thought he was trailing Sleuth, and the detective knew he was trailing Bigelow, and there stood the difference.

The detective's pal was a man well up in his business, and, having received his hints, he knew just how to work the game. He walked along down-town and soon disappeared in a regular sailors' boarding-house.

Bigelow had followed, and when he saw his man enter the boarding-house he was taken all aback, and exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be shot! That gets me!"

Sleuth was near by—indeed, near enough to overhear the exclamation.

Bigelow stood a moment, and then said:

"Well, I've got him holed. I know where to come to look for him, so that's all square. It might not be safe to run into his lair to-night. He's on the lookout for me; but to-morrow I'll get down on him. I'll be a sailor just from sea."

Sleuth had got down so as to hear every word Bigelow spoke, and there was a faint smile on his face, for he saw how he really had his man dead to rights. Bigelow, after a moment, started to walk away, and Sleuth fell to his trail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SLEUTH had made up his mind to rush his shadow right along, and, in order to get on to his man, worked a most radical change in his appearance.

He had one little incident in his favor. The man Bigelow had, as he supposed, tracked Sleuth to a certain resort, and he would be congratulating himself on his smartness and would not dream of the fine trick that had been played on him.

Sleuth's purpose was to shadow the man to his home. The detective calculated that the papers, if there were any, would be there, and it was with a determination to hold on to his trail that he kept the man's steps in sight.

Bigelow proceeded toward Broadway, and was walking along leisurely when suddenly he made a turn and seized hold of a young fellow whom he met in the street. The detective was near by at the moment, and, as the two men moved to the edge of the sidewalk and stood under a street-lamp, he had a good chance to view the young man's face whom Bigelow had hailed.

The detective was deeply interested at once, as there was something very strange and startling in the incident. The young man was a very handsome fellow, not over three-and-twenty, and he seemed to be laboring under a fit of great excitement and trepidation, and Sleuth also, with his keen, discerning eye, detected the fact that the young man was evidently anxious to separate from his companion, while Bigelow was equally determined and anxious that he should not. Sleuth managed under the darkness to get near enough to overhear a part of the conversation that passed between the two men, and the conversation he overheard was very startling and suggestive.

"You did not meet me last night as you promised, Frank."

The young man answered, in a stammering and hesitating manner:

"No, I could not be on hand last night."

"Where were you?"

"I remained home last night. I went right home from the office."

"Hold on, that won't do. What are you giving me?"

"It's the truth."

"No, sir, you were seen; you were into the game last night, and you were a loser."

"No. I swear I went straight home from the office."

"Then you have a double?"

"I don't know about that."

"You were seen."

"If any one thinks they saw me I must have a double."

"There is a man who saw you."

"Then it is some one who looks like me."

"Where were you going to-night?"

"Nowhere."

"Come with me."

"Where do you want me to go?"

"We'll take a look in at a game."

"I can't go now."

"Why not?"

"I've an appointment."

"Who with?"

"I can't tell you."

"How long will your engagement detain you?"

"I don't know."

"Can you meet me at midnight?"

"I don't know."

"Will you?"

The young man appeared to consider a moment, and then, in a desperate tone, said:

"Yes, I will meet you."

"Now see here, Frank, old man, I've a good scheme to pull you out of the hole you are in. Meet me, and I will open up the whole business to you."

"I don't think I can ever get out of the hole I am in."

"Yes, you can; I am a friend of yours, but you won't believe it. But you will meet me?"

"Yes; I will meet you."

"I have your word?"

"Yes."

"And you mean to keep it, old boy?"

"Yes; I will meet you."

Sleuth was deeply interested. He had formed a certain idea. He had encountered during his long career so many

cases similar to what he judged the one to be that was attracting his attention at that moment.

"Now mind, Frank, I tell you I've a big scheme—a sure thing. I know you've suffered a great deal, but I'll pull you out if you will meet me. Good-night."

Bigelow walked away, and the young man still stood under the gas-light, and the detective overheard him mutter:

"Yes, you'll pull me out a heap! It was you who got me into the hole, you scoundrel! But I'll meet you. Yes, I'll meet you; but it is the last time we'll meet. I'll take one more chance, and then—"

The young man stopped short; but, after a moment, added:

"Yes, yes; I'll meet you—and the meeting will be my last, for it will be on the verge of the grave. Yes, yes; an open grave yawns before me. I'll meet him!"

A moment the detective was in a quandary. He did not decide on the instant whether to follow Bigelow or get upon the track of the young man; but after a few moments' thought he reached a conclusion, and muttered:

"I'll just follow this young fellow. I may be of use to him to-night, and I may pull him out of the hole."

Old Sleuth had a great partiality for young men—especially when he considered them good and noble at heart. He had decided that this young man was good at heart. He could see that he had done some wrong, and he discerned also that the young fellow suffered, not from fear altogether, but from the consciousness of having taken a false step.

The young man walked down the street and Sleuth followed. Soon the youth turned and proceeded toward Union Square Park; and, reaching a certain point, he commenced to walk to and fro.

Sleuth was at hand. He had a way of concealing himself, and it was an easy matter in the present instance, as the young fellow was so deeply absorbed he had little attention to give to his surroundings. At length the detective heard him say:

"Will she come? I hope not. Oh, why did I confide in her? I have but caused her deep anxiety; and yet, why should she be anxious on my account?"

"Ah!" muttered the detective, "so there is a woman in the case;" and little did the great detective dream of the startling *dénouement* that was to follow his shadow of this troubled youth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE young man continued to pace to and fro, and the interest of the detective increased, and so matters proceeded until the youth exclaimed:

"She will not come! It is well. Alas! I shall never see her again, for I can not endure this agony any longer!"

The young man was about turning away when suddenly there appeared, walking very rapidly along the path, a young lady. The latter's face was concealed behind a veil, but the youth saw her approaching and recognized her despite the veil, for he exclaimed:

"Alas! here she comes."

A moment later and the veiled lady had approached near enough to speak, and she said:

"I have kept you waiting."

When Sleuth heard the voice he gave a start, and his heart beat rapidly as he muttered:

"Great Scott! that voice—what does it mean? Can it be— No, no, it can not be!"

Meantime the youth had answered:

"It does not matter."

"I could not help keeping you waiting, and I regret it very much."

"It's all right."

"What has happened, Frank?"

"Nothing."

"There has been no change?"

"No."

"Oh, dear! I wish I could help you. But you must hope; help will come from some direction."

"I do not look for help now. I must face my doom. Yes, the consequences of my crime confront me, my sin has found me out!"

"It was a sin, Frank, but it was not a crime."

"Ah, I can not cloak it—yes, it was a crime."

"But you will never do so again, and relief will come. You can conceal it until help comes."

"I have concealed it as long as I can."

"Frank," suddenly exclaimed the veiled lady, "I can help you, I think."

"You can help me?"

"Yes."

Sleuth was amazed.

"Great guns!" he muttered. "What does this mean? There can be no mistake. I know that voice. What does she do here? Who is Frank, and what has been his crime, and how can she help him?"

There followed a moment's silence, and the young man asked:

"How can you help me?"

"I have four hundred dollars."

"You have four hundred dollars?"

"Yes."

"And you propose to loan this money to me?"

"Yes."

"You are a darling girl, a brave, good, kind-hearted girl, but I can not take your money."

"You must take it."

"No, no; I will not."

"But you must—you can pay me back. It may appear strange that I did not tell you about this money before, but some day I will explain all to you."

"I will not take your four hundred dollars."

"You must take it, and, as I said, some day you can pay me back."

"No, keep your money."

"No, no, Frank, it is yours as a loan."

"You compel me to make a confession."

"A confession?"

"Yes. The amount is not sufficient for me."

The veiled girl uttered a sudden cry of pain, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Frank, I fear!"

"What do you fear?"

"I dare not tell you."

"Yes, tell me. Let it all be plain and direct between us now."

"You have broken your promise to me."

"Broken my promise?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"When you first revealed this matter to me, you said the amount was less than four hundred dollars, and now you say four hundred dollars is not enough to cover your indebtedness. You promised me you would not increase the debt?"

"I did."

"And you have broken your promise?"

"Yes."

The young man spoke in a tone of great desperation.

"Oh, how could you do it, Frank?"

"I can not explain now. I may some day."

"Those men got hold of you again?"

"Well, yes."

"You hoped to raise the amount the same way you lost?"

"I admit that what you charge is true."

"I warned you against those men."

"I know it."

"They are only seeking to get you deeper in the mire."

"I know it."

"And why did you yield to them?"

"I am mad. I have lost all my manhood—all power over my will. I am a wreck."

"Oh, Frank, it is terrible to hear you talk in this manner!"

Sleuth heard every word that passed, and he was amazed—yes, amazed; for reasons that will appear.

The young man was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"Gussie, how is it you take such a deep interest in me?"

"Frank, you know well."

Sleuth's suspicions were fully confirmed. When the veiled lady had first spoken he thought the voice sounded familiar, and as the conversation proceeded his suspicions grew stronger, and, at last, all doubt was removed. The young man had addressed the veiled lady as Gussie, and

the detective knew it was Gussie Thatford who was a party to this strange dialogue. Gussie Thatford was the veiled lady—the *incognita*. The detective did not know what to make of her presence there at that moment. He had left her in his home. He had given her strict injunctions not to go forth upon the street, and she had disobeyed him, and she had let it be betrayed that she had a deep interest in a young man who was a confessed criminal.

"There is some strange mystery here," muttered the detective.

He admitted a mystery, and yet he pretty well discerned one phase of the strange incident.

The young man had asked: "Why do you take such a strange interest in me?" and the veiled lady had answered: "Frank, you know well," and here was the mystery.

There followed a few moments of silence—yes, minutes actually passed before the young man spoke again, and then Sleuth detected deep emotion in his voice, as he said:

"Gussie, under different circumstances I would have something to say to you, but as things stand I will be silent, and will only say that I thank you for your deep interest in me, and right here, and now, I propose to bid you good-bye."

"You are going away, Frank?"

"Yes, I am going away."

"Where are you going?"

"It is a secret, Gussie. I am going away to escape arrest and exposure."

"Frank, your resolution meets my hearty approval. It is wise for you to go away, since danger menaces you. Yes, go away. And in time you can earn money and clear yourself, and in the meantime I will work and save my money, and we will soon have enough; but if you stay here you will get deeper and deeper in debt."

Little did the fair girl dream of the bourn to which the young man intended to go.

CHAPTER XXV.

SLEUTH suspected the young man's purpose, and he was on the alert. Meantime the veiled girl said:

"You must let me hear from you and keep me posted as to how you get along, and I will write to you, and when we get money enough all will be well."

"How kind and hopeful you are, Gussie. But listen to me: you must forget that I ever lived; let all recollection of me pass from your memory. We will never meet again."

"Oh, Frank, do not speak in such a hopeless manner!"

"Yes, the truth must be told, Gussie, I told you once I loved you. I do love you. Yes, love you as fondly as man ever loved woman; but when I first met you the shadow was already overhanging me. In a desperate moment I confessed the truth to you. I should not have done so, but now, let me tell you, the amount I owe is so great we can never hope to pay it, and again when I go away my crime will be discovered and my name forever covered with disgrace and obloquy. You are a brave and noble girl. I have wronged you—yes, I have done you a great wrong. I confess it, but you must forgive and forget me. When we part to-night, we part never to meet again."

"You must not go away, Frank. Promise to see me once again."

"No, there is no use."

"Yes, Frank, you must promise."

A moment the young man stood silent and irresolute, then suddenly he exclaimed:

"I will end it all here and now! Gussie, forgive me."

As the youth spoke he drew a revolver from his pocket and clapped the muzzle against his temple, but ere the weapon exploded it was dashed from his hand. A man had leaped from the neighboring clump of trees and had seized the pistol, and to the young man he said:

"Fool! what would you do?"

The whole startling incident had transpired in a few seconds. The veiled girl stood mute, and the young man gazed madly at his rescuer. An instant later the detective approached the veiled lady and whispered:

"Go to your home, miss."

"No, I can not leave him. He is mad; he will destroy himself."

Sleuth reached down, and putting his lips close to the girl's ear, whispered:

"Gussie, you can go home and leave him to me. I am Sleuth."

The girl drew aside her veil and looked appealingly in the detective's face, and he repeated, still bending close to her ear:

"Go home at once. Leave all to me."

The girl turned and walked slowly away. Meantime Frank had stood as motionless as a statue.

He had not heard the words that passed between Gussie and the detective. In fact, he little cared for the moment. He was mad—yes, stark mad.

As the girl walked away Sleuth slipped his arm in Frank's and said:

"Come with me, young man."

The youth appeared to recover his senses, and, attempting to release himself from the detective, said:

"Who are you?"

"Come with me and I will tell you who I am."

"I will not go."

"Yes, yes, come along. 'I am your friend.'"

"You are my friend?" repeated the young man.

"Yes, I am your friend, and you must go with me."

"Where will you go?"

"I'll show you."

"I can not go."

"Listen, young man: I am not only your friend, but I will prove myself the man to get you out of your scrape."

The youth gazed aghast.

"You will get me out of my scrape?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Sir, what scrape am I in, pray?"

"Come along, and I will tell you all about it."

"I never saw you before, sir."

"That is all right; but I've seen you."

"You have seen me, sir?"

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"I've seen you with a man who is not your friend, and who will lead you to ruin."

"Ah! I see," said the youth. "You are Bigelow's friend. I know now how it was that you were near to prevent me from killing myself."

"My young friend, you do not know anything about it. I am not a friend of Bigelow, and my presence here is accidental, but it is fortunate. Come. You are in a bad way; I know that, but I will get you out of the scrape."

"You will get me out of the scrape again?" repeated the youth.

"Yes, I will."

"You do not know what you promise."

"Yes, I do."

"And you know my trouble?"

"Yes, I do."

"What is my trouble?"

"You are a defaulter."

"Yes, I am," came the abrupt admission.

"Now, you see, I know what I am talking about, and I will help you."

"Why should you help me, sir?"

"I will help you because I am a friend of the young lady with whom you were just talking."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE young man expressed considerable surprise when the detective made his statement, and exclaimed:

"And do you know that young lady?"

"Yes, I do."

"And will you tell me who you are?"

"Not at present. I must first hear your story; and now, come; you promised to go with me."

"I will go with you, but I have an appointment. Will you return my pistol?"

"No, sir."

"You need not fear; I will not again attempt to do myself harm."

"That will not do; and now, listen: you have an appointment with the man Bigelow."

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I am a mind-reader. I know many things. You have plenty of time to go with me. You can meet Bigelow afterward."

"I hope you will not insist upon my going with you."

"I do insist. I have told you I am interested in you, and I will get you out of trouble."

"How do you know I am in trouble?"

"I told you once. You are a defaulter, and I told you it was my secret. Now, come with me."

"I will go," said the youth, and he slipped his hand in Sleuth's offered arm, and the two walked away together.

The detective had made a study of the young man, and the result of his observation was the conclusion that Frank was a pretty good sort of fellow who had been misled. Sleuth led the way to a lunch-room where he was well acquainted, and, taking a seat in a private supper-room, said:

"Come, now, tell me about yourself."

"I do not desire to tell my story."

"You must."

"Will you tell me who you are, sir?"

Sleuth thought a moment, and then, knowing the power of his name, said:

"Did you ever hear of Sleuth, the detective?"

The youth gave a start, and, in an alarmed voice, answered:

"Yes, sir."

"I am Sleuth, the detective."

"And I am lost!" cried the youth. "I see it all."

"What do you see?"

"You have been on my track, and that is how you were present to prevent me from killing myself."

"You are mistaken, my son. I did not know of your existence until to-night. But you will find it a very lucky circumstance that I did run across you."

"I do not understand it."

"I will explain. I am a good friend of the young lady who was with you a short time ago. She is stopping at my house."

"Stopping at your house?"

"Yes."

"That is strange," said the youth.

"Yes, it is strange; and now tell me, did that young lady ever tell you she was an heiress?"

"No, sir. She is a working-girl."

"You have known her for some time?"

"About a year."

"Ah!" muttered Sleuth; and an instant later he added:

"That was a nice little game you attempted to play."

"What game?"

"Bah! you can not deceive me. I know all about it. You wish to desert her, and your attempt was but a piece of acting; but I thought I'd let it pass as real for the time being."

The youth stared, and after an interval said:

"What do you mean, sir, when you say I intended to desert her?"

"Oh, I know."

"You are mistaken, sir—sadly mistaken. I never did Gussie a wrong. There is no reason why I should desert her. I did tell her that I loved her, and I do; but at the time I told her of my position."

Sleuth felt great relief. He knew the young man was telling the truth, and his darkest suspicion was dispelled.

"And if you love her, why did you attempt to kill yourself?"

The youth did not answer, and the detective said:

"If you are wise you will confide in me."

"I will tell you all, sir; it will make no difference now."

"Yes, tell me all."

"I am employed in a large dry-goods house."

"Well?"

"I am cashier."

"Go on."

"One day I went down to the races."

"Ah, I see."

"Yes, sir, it is the old story—I bet and lost. The man Bigelow gave me the 'tip' and induced me to bet. I lost."

"The money was your own?"

"Yes, sir, the money I lost the first day was my own."

"And in the end you used your employer's money?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how did you happen to keep up your acquaintance with Bigelow?"

"I met him every time I went to the races, and one night he accused me of being a defaulter, and told me if I

did not give him two hundred and fifty dollars he would inform my employers."

"You gave him the money?"

"Yes, sir; and since then I have given him more. And I have lost a great deal of money at the faro-table, and I believe Bigelow divides up the money with the man who runs it."

"How much are you behind?"

"Between five and six thousand dollars."

Old Sleuth was thoughtful a moment, and, then said:

"Young man, you can be of great service to me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN the detective made the statement, "Young man, you can be of service to me," the youth asked:

"How?"

"Wait. I must hear all your story, and then I will tell you how you can be of service to me."

"There is little more to tell, sir. Those men have been upon my track. They have terrorized me, and it was my fear of them that led me on to take sum after sum belonging to my employers. They led me to gamble, saying I could win and settle up my debt, and so it went on. I became deeper and deeper in debt, and now I am ruined."

"It is the old, old story," remarked the detective, reflectively; "yes, it has happened often and often before. I have met many cases just like yours. Your case is heralded in this city almost every week. Sometimes there follows exposure. At other times the defaulter escapes or disappears, and the robbed employers say nothing of their losses; and, young man, let me tell you one thing: all these cases find their rise in drink or gambling. Usually the drink comes first, and then the betting on horse races follows in time, and disgrace closes the game. It will be a wise deed when race-track betting is made a felony, and when gambling in every form is abolished, for the victims each year can be counted by thousands."

"Yes, sir, that is true," said the youth. "If I had never made a race bet I would not now be in the condition I am, and I would have stopped when I lost my own money if it had not been for this man Bigelow."

"Yes, young men should eschew every man who advises them to bet. No real friend will ever seek to induce a young clerk to try any games of hazard."

"I am sorry," said the youth, "you prevented me from blowing my brains out, for had you let me alone, now all would be over."

"Well, young man, you speak from little knowledge; but you are more fortunate than you dream."

"I could not be more unfortunate, sir."

"Yes, you could."

"How, sir?"

"You would have been more unfortunate if the girl—Gussie Thatford—had not been your friend."

"It is there the great misfortune comes in, sir."

"As you see it."

"As it is."

"Let us see how. In the first place, I am a friend of Miss Thatford, and through my interest in her I am your friend also."

"I am very thankful; but, alas, you can not aid me now."

"We shall see. Did I not tell you I was your friend? And when I am your friend you are all right."

"I am all right?"

"Yes."

"But, sir, I owe six thousand dollars; even more!"

"Is that all?"

"Why, sir, it would take me seven years to save up that money!"

"Seven years, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then your salary is about a thousand a year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Frank, where did you first meet Gussie Thatford?"

"Do not ask me that question."

"I have already asked you the question, and you must give me an answer."

"I first met her on the street."

"Under what circumstances?"

"She will tell you."

"No, you tell me."

"A man assaulted her, sir, one night when she was returning from work. I came along and knocked the man down and protected her."

"You were a good fellow."

"I could not do less, sir. She is an innocent and virtuous girl."

"You love her?"

The young man blushed.

"You have told her of your love?"

The young man did not answer, and the detective asked:

"You told her of your love?"

"Yes."

"And did she not confess to a return of your love?"

"She has not, sir. But she has shown great interest and sympathy."

"How did you happen to meet her to-night?"

"I received a message from her."

"When?"

"To-day."

"And you had already made up your mind to kill yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were a fool, young man."

"You do not know, sir, what it is to be in my condition; I am mad."

"I know something as to the condition of your mind; and now listen to me: I will save you."

"You will save me, sir?"

"Yes, I will."

"But the money?"

"If it is paid you will never gamble any more?"

"Never, sir."

"Suppose I pay the money and you give me your notes and start in and pay the amount by installments?"

"Ah, sir, am I dreaming?"

"You are wide awake; it is no dream, and I mean just what I say. I will pay the money and you shall give me your notes and pay me by installments."

"Oh, sir, this can not be real! Do I dream?"

"No; you are wide awake, and, under all the circumstances, very lucky."

"Oh, sir, did you but know the agony I have endured!"

"The wrong-doer always suffers agony. Sin is accompanied with suffering, sooner or later, every time. And now let's see—it is near midnight?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have an appointment with Bigelow?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must keep your appointment."

The young man's face fell, and he said, in a sad tone:

"Then you will not help me, after all?"

"Yes, I will help you."

"And pay the money?"

"Yes."

"Then I will never meet Bigelow again, and if he comes near me I will knock him down!"

"A good idea. But I will reveal a secret to you. I am on Bigelow's track. He is a professional burglar. You can aid me to bring him to justice."

"I do not fully understand."

"You are to enter my service as an aid, and I will pay you well for your service, and in that way you can pay off the debt you will owe me."

"And resign from my position?"

"Not at once; but listen to my plan. I will pay your indebtedness to-morrow; indeed, the first thing I will do in the morning will be to give you the full amount you owe, and you will make good the deficiency; so on that score you can make your mind easy."

"What am I to do?"

"Keep your appointment with Bigelow, and later on I will explain more fully my plans. He will open up some scheme to-night. You listen to all he has to say. Pretend to go in with him, and then report back to me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE young man suddenly brightened up; he became quite cheerful, and there returned to his face the old-time, resolute expression which it was evident accompanied his natural temperament. It was his sin that had made a coward of him, as it "makes cowards of us all;" but when there came a prospect of immediate release from the conse-

quences of his sin, he experienced a return of his old-time courage.

"I will do anything to serve you," he said, adding: "I am no coward, naturally, and I'd brave anything to bring that scoundrel Bigelow and his pals to punishment."

"You can do so; but you must act entirely as I advise."

"I will, sir."

"In a day or two I will make a most wonderful and startling revelation to you."

"I will be proud, sir, when you make me your confidant."

"And you will then better understand why I have become your friend, and why I am on Bigelow's track. I will explain this much to you: millions are concerned in my successful trailing of this man."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes; and now, you see, if you aid me, the payment of your deficiency will prove but a mere bagatelle."

"Oh, sir, how really fortunate I am!"

"I rather think you are more fortunate than you dream. Yes, sir, to-night I more fully realize the truth of the legend that, 'There is a destiny that shape our ends rough hew them as we may.'"

"My heart is filling with courage."

"That is good; and now, listen to me: Remember, no matter what may occur, you have nothing to fear as to the consequences of your defalcation."

"Oh, thank you, sir."

"No matter what Bigelow may threaten, you need not fear."

"I will defy him."

"No; I am only telling you what you will know; but you must let him still think you are in his power and at his mercy."

"Ah, I begin to see."

"As far as to-night is concerned you will go with him, and if he asks you to gamble do so. You will probably lose, and you must act as though you were desperate and almost ready to blow your brains out."

"I have no money to gamble with, sir. I made up my mind to-night that I would not take another cent, come what might—exposure, death, ruin. Yes, sir, I had made up my mind to defy Bigelow and his gang."

"I am glad to hear you say so. But you must enter into the scheme all the same."

"How can I, sir?"

Sleuth handed the youth a roll of bills.

"There's your ammunition," he said.

"Do you propose to have me throw all this money away, sir?"

"No; but *you* can lose it and still it will not be lost."

"I do not understand, sir."

"It is not necessary for you to understand that part of it, and now again, I will arrange a signal with you so you will always know when I am near. But you must be very careful not to give me or yourself away. Do you fully understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are free from the consequences of your crime, but you must act as though still overshadowed by those consequences."

"I see, sir."

"We have a great game to play. I think you are just the man to aid me, and I think the circumstances favor your being of great aid to me."

The detective explained more fully his plans, and then told Frank to go and keep his appointment.

The youth started to go away. His face was radiant, when the detective called him back, and asked:

"What is your name?"

"Frank Brumack."

"Frank Brumack?" repeated the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"If I do not meet with you to-night you meet me here after you part with Bigelow."

"Yes, sir."

"You must see that you are not followed."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go."

Frank started out and the detective quietly worked a transform. In fact, Sleuth could work half a dozen in one evening when once he went forth previously prepared to do so.

As Frank Brumack walked along the street at the still hour of midnight his heart was light. There had come a complete change over the spirit of his dreams, or rather the dark dreams had vanished, and brighter dreams and anticipations had come in their stead. As he walked along he muttered:

"Am I really awake or do I still dream?" The answer to his self-questioning came in a most startling manner, for even while he walked and talked there came a tremendous thwack upon his back, and turning he found himself confronted by Bigelow.

"Halloo, Frank! you're on hand, I see!"

"Yes."

"Young fellow, I've good news for you!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; you're all right."

"No; I am not all right."

"Bah! nonsense; what are you talking about? You are all right; you're a good fellow. I've made up my mind to see you through, and I will."

"No, sir, you can not save me now."

"I can't, eh? You don't know what I can do. I've got matters all arranged. It's a go this time; no faro, but a dead open and shut."

"No, faro, eh?"

"No."

"You've got a tip, I suppose?"

"Nixey! I've got on to a flat, and we'll get your money back to-night. You see, there is a fellow come on here from out West who has got some thousands with him, and he wants to get into a game of draw. I've got on to him, and I've made him think he's got a flat, do you see, and we're to get into a game. The first night you're to let us win; and the next night we will just go for him and take his whole pile."

It was a genuine night scene in New York as these two men stood under the gas-light to arrange their plans.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRANK BRUMACK for a moment was at a loss as to how he should act; but it came to his recollection that the detective had told him to agree to everything that Bigelow proposed, and he determined to obey orders. But it appeared that the detective feared he would not, and the young man got a tip from a quarter he didn't expect. A passer-by ran against him, and as the collision occurred there fell upon his ear the words:

"Go it!"

"By ginger!" thought the youth, "that detective is a wonder"—for he knew at once from what quarter the tip had come.

In the meantime, as the collider passed on, Bigelow asked:

"What do you think of it, old man?"

"I do not know what to think."

"Have you got any money with you?"

"Yes; but I tell you this can not go on much longer. I am deeply in debt."

"Oh, certainly; but we'll pull you out. This is a good scheme."

"I've made my last dip."

"You have?"

"Yes."

There came a curious expression to Bigelow's face.

"This scheme must go through for a winner, or I'm a goner!"

"You will come out all right. If this little game fails we have a last card to play."

"I fear this will be our last card."

"Nay, old man, never say die. But come, we will go and meet this fellow."

Frank was led to a low dive, and introduced to a fellow gotten up for the occasion.

The young man would have fallen to the game, even if he had not already been prepared for the trick by Sleuth.

We will not weary our readers with a detailed description of what occurred. These scenes have been fully depicted so often in our narratives and in all the incidents follow about the same lines.

The little game was carried out. Frank lost all the money Sleuth had loaned him, amounting to several hun-

dred dollars, and when it was all gone he suddenly exclaimed:

"I'm broke!"

It was the stranger and not Bigelow who was the winner, and when the game was over the man coolly put the money in his pocket, and fixing his eyes on Bigelow, he said:

"Old man, you thought you were playing me, didn't you?"

"No, sir."

"Bah! I knew your game all the time. You thought to skin me, but I've skinned you. We don't play any more. This little boodle is mine. You can whistle. I was up to your game—a sort of double-flat game, but you are the flat. Good-night."

The man walked out.

As the fellow who had captured the boodle reached the bar, he said:

"Tell Bigelow I'll wait for him at Jinsey's."

There was standing at the bar at the time a miserable-looking old specimen of humanity, and the miserable specimen overheard the man's remark, and when the man went out the miserable specimen followed him. The winner proceeded a few squares and reached a dark street, when suddenly the miserable specimen appeared in front of him with extended palm.

"Halloo! What do you want?"

"A stake."

"You want a stake, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, old fellow, you git or I'll bust you."

"You will? You give me a stake or I'll bust you!" came the answer.

The words had hardly left the lips of the miserable specimen when the winner made a strike for him. The intended blow was warded off, and a counter blow sent the man reeling. As he fell, a curse burst from his lips, but he received a kick that silenced him for the instant and the miserable specimen was upon him, and as the latter rose from off the prostrate man, he whispered:

"It's triple flats."

The miserable specimen spoke, laughed and ran away, and the man who had been knocked down rose to his feet. His hand went to the pocket in which he kept his wallet, and in the same wallet he had placed his night's winnings, or more properly speaking, his night's "skinnings."

"By all that's strange and magical," he cried, "the money's gone!" and the laugh he had heard the miserable specimen utter still rang in his ears. "Here's a go," he resumed. "By my beard! but what will Bigelow say? There'll be a jolly row, you bet, for I know Bigelow's broke. Mag skinned him out of every dollar to-day. That woman requires a million a month to keep her running. I'll go back and report at once," the fellow continued.

Meantime Bigelow had remained with Frank, and as the winner disappeared the youth said:

"There goes the last of it."

"Not by a long shot, Johnny."

"Yes, sir, that is the last of it. You heard what that man said?"

"Yes, he did come it over me."

"I thought you were a sport."

"So did I, but I take a back seat. But now, see here, young man, I've a good scheme."

"You musn't give me any scheme to-night; I'm wild!"

"Is that so?"

"It's the truth."

"Something must be done."

"Nothing can be done."

"Yes; I will have a scheme for you to-morrow."

"You have had scheme after scheme."

"I know it."

"None of them ever amounted to anything. I've lost right along on your schemes."

"But this is a good one, it is a sure one, and you will see it at once. It will lift you right out of the whole business."

"That is what you have told me all along."

"Well, you meet me to-morrow night."

"Where?"

"Here."

"I will have no money."

"You need bring no money with you."

"This is the first time you ever let me go without telling me to bring a stake."

"I see. But it's a different game I'm on now. It will not require any money."

"I am glad you are on a scheme at last that does not require money. You've played me, Bigelow."

"Meet me here to-morrow, and, as sure as you are a live man, I will open a scheme that will pull you out, and you will see how it can be done at a glance."

Frank left the room and the place, and a moment later Bigelow's pal entered to report his loss, and there followed a mad scene from the "Rogues' Opera."

CHAPTER XXX.

As the man entered the place, Bigelow exclaimed, with a chuckle:

"Tom, we did that well; but it's our last pull."

"Is it?"

"Yes. And now give us our rake."

There came a rather odd expression to Tom's face as he said:

"It's gone."

"What's gone?"

"The money."

There came a fierce light in Bigelow's eyes as he said:

"So you mean to play me for a flat, eh?"

"I'm telling you the truth."

"Are you?"

Bigelow spoke in a very significant tone.

"Yes, I am."

"It won't wash, Tom, old man, if you're in earnest, and, if you're joking, give over, for I'm in no mood to joke."

"The money is gone."

"Hand over!"

"It's gone, I tell you!"

"How did it go?"

Tom told his story.

Bigelow at length permitted it to get fixed in his head that possibly Tom was telling the truth, and he asked him to tell his story, which Tom did, and when he had concluded, Bigelow said:

"There's something under all this."

"I reckon there is," said Tom. "The man who came for me looked like a poor, weak, helpless devil, but his 'thump' was like the kick of a mule."

Bigelow soon after left the place, and he was lost in deep thought; and as he walked along he indulged in a low soliloquy.

"I can't understand this," he said; "there's something wrong. An old man, a regular tramp, was hanging around that place and peeping into that room. It looks bad, I say. There's a detective on that young fool's track. The firm have tumbled to his lift, and they're tagging him, that's what's the matter. And Bigelow, old man, that cop may have seen you, and may be on your track. Aha! we're traced. We'll crawl; yes, we'll get to cover, but play the game all the same; and Mag shall come in and take a hand."

The man at length reached quite a respectable little house. He did not ring a bell, but entered with a night-key, and as the door closed behind him a man stepped from the shadow of a tree and muttered:

"Mr. Bigelow, we've run you to your burrow, after all."

The speaker took the bearings of the house, and turned and walked away; and half an hour later entered the place where Old Sleuth, the detective, had held his talk with Frank Brumack. It was well into the morning, but the restaurant was an all-night house, and Frank was there awaiting the return of the detective. The young man was a little nervous, as he feared he had lost the money in a quarter from which it could never be recovered.

"So you are here ahead of me?" said the detective.

"Yes, I am here. But the money is gone."

"Yes, as far as you are concerned. But it's all right."

"I lost it at—"

"I know how you lost it. You had a little game of bluff. That's all right. I played another game of 'draw,' and I've got the money all right."

"Do you mean to tell me you have the money?"

"Yes; I have every cent of it."

The young man was really speechless with amazement.

"How did you get it?"

"Oh, that's my secret, and, let me tell you, I want you

to meet me in Wall Street to-morrow at exactly half past nine o'clock. Be there on the minute. I am a sort of Monte Cristo as concerns punctuality. Do not fail to be there on time."

"I will be there. But I have not reported what passed to-night."

"No; I know all that passed. You were robbed."

"Yes."

"And I've got the money back, and you are to meet Bigelow to-morrow."

"Yes."

"And he is to open up a sure scheme to you."

"Yes."

"Have you any idea as to the nature of his scheme?"

"I have not."

Sleuth laughed and said:

"It is a sure one, as he told you."

"And you know his scheme?"

"I think I do."

"What is it?"

"You can't guess?"

"No."

"He intends to compel you to enter into a scheme to rob your employers out and out."

"I'll never do that."

"You never will?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, yes, you will."

The young man for the first time felt a thrill of real suspicion flash through his mind."

"I never will," he said.

"We will wait until to-morrow, and then we will talk it over," said Sleuth.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE detective arranged specifically for his meeting with Frank on the following day, and after a night of strange adventure the two men separated.

The detective reached his home and managed to secure a few hours' sleep, and on the succeeding morning he held an interview with Gussie Thatford.

The girl had been waiting to meet him, and there was a look of trepidation in her eyes when at length the detective sent her word to appear in his library.

As our readers know, Sleuth was a man of considerable wealth, and he lived in an elegant mansion, surrounded by every comfort. When the girl entered the room she expected to see a frown upon the great detective's face, but instead, Sleuth rose, and extending his hand kindly, led her to a seat, and asked her a few general questions in order to give her an opportunity to fully regain her self-possession; but at length he asked:

"Well, my child, how do you feel after your strange adventure last night?"

"Oh, sir, you will permit me to explain all to you?"

"Certainly I will permit you to explain all to me."

"First, sir, let me ask you what happened after you sent me away?"

"It's all right."

"What is all right, sir?"

"The young man will not harm himself."

"You are angry with me, Mr. Loveland, for having disobeyed you after you had commanded that I should not leave your home."

"You certainly did a very rash thing."

"Yes, sir, I know it; but the circumstances are so strange; indeed, it appears as though I were destined to be the victim of all manner of adventures."

"I reckon you will settle down to a quiet life some day."

"Before telling you certain facts, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Do you really think, sir, that I am an heiress?"

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said: "I can not give you a positive answer. One thing is certain. I have got on to some strange facts, as the detectives say, and it is possible—yes, just possible, that some day, after a long time, I may secure a fortune for you."

"You can not hold out any definite hope, sir?"

"No, I can not at present."

"Can you tell me just how probable the chances are?"

"Not at present. But now, tell me your story—tell me

how you came to disregard my request for you to remain within doors for a few days."

"The young man whom you prevented from killing himself last night is named Frank Brumack."

"Ah, yes; so I understand."

"Then you had a talk with him?"

"I ascertained his name."

Suddenly Gussie's beautiful face assumed a deathly hue. There came a look of terror to her eyes and a wild anxiety in her voice, as she exclaimed:

"Oh, sir! I just recall—"

"What?"

"You are a great detective?"

"Yes, so they say."

"You were present last night?"

"Yes."

"You were there to watch Frank—you did not follow to—to watch me?"

The girl's voice was husky as she spoke, and her delicate and graceful form trembled.

"Yes, I was following the young man."

"Oh, sir! is he under arrest?"

"No."

"Thank you. But, sir, you know concerning him?"

"Know what?"

"Concerning his crime?"

"Frankly—yes."

"And you were trailing him?"

"We will not talk about that now. I will assert that I do not mean to arrest him at present, and possibly not at all. I desire to learn of your association with him."

"You wish me to tell you how I first met him?"

"Yes."

"Sir, you know I am a helpless young lady. Well, in the shop where I was then working was a man who appeared to have discovered that I was under a disguise, and he commenced to persecute me, and I left the shop. He followed, and learned where I lived, and one evening he assailed me on the streets, and he would have done me personal violence had not a youth hastened to my rescue. The rescuer was Frank Brumack, and from that moment we became friends. He punished the man who assailed me, and made the fellow behave. Then I changed my residence, and managed to avoid a meeting with my assailant. Meantime, occasionally Frank called to see me. I learned that he was a clever and able young man, a youth of good education and fine feeling, and, like myself, he was an orphan. Well, he visited me quite often, and I soon discovered that there was some trouble on his mind, and one Sunday I went to walk with him in the park, and he seemed particularly low-spirited and depressed, and I urged him to confide in me, and at length he did. He told me his story. Do you know the facts?"

"I do."

"After I learned his story I kept thinking in my mind how I could devise some means to aid him, and on the day previous to my meeting with you, I had written him a note to meet me, and then I was brought here and I knew he would be waiting for me, and at the last moment I determined to keep my appointment. Did I do right?"

"No; I can not say that you did."

"What should I have done, sir?"

"You should have confided in me."

"I can see now that I should have done so. But, all things considered, I was laboring under great excitement."

"Yes, I do not blame you."

There followed a moment's silence, broken at length by Gussie, who said:

"I am about to make an extraordinary request, sir."

"Proceed."

"You are a rich man."

"Well?"

Sleuth assumed a rather sharp tone, and the beautiful girl gave a start.

"I hardly dare proceed, sir."

"Yes, proceed."

"I have a few hundred dollars."

"Well?"

"I thought—"

The girl spoke hesitatingly.

"What do you think?"

"If you, sir, will put a few hundred to what I possess we could pay Frank's indebtedness to the firm, and I will

assume the debt. I will work and turn over all my surplus earnings until the money is repaid to you, and Frank will turn over his also, and between us, in time, we will pay every dollar."

There came a peculiar gleam to the eyes of the old detective, and he asked the question:

"Suppose I agree to aid you?"

"Oh, sir, it will be such a great deed of goodness."

"But what guarantee have you that Frank will not steal again?"

"Oh, sir, do not call it stealing!"

"Well, what guarantee have you that he will not borrow his employer's money again?"

"He never will, sir!"

The girl spoke with great decision.

"He never will?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I will guarantee, sir, that he never will."

"But how can you guarantee it?"

"I can, sir."

"But how?"

The girl blushed to the temples as she answered, in a low tone:

"I will pledge my life, sir, that he never will take what belongs to another again! I will pledge my life on it!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"You may pledge your word," said the detective; and one who knew him well would have detected a strain of tenderness in his tones.

"I will pledge my word," said the girl.

"But how can you guarantee your pledge?"

"I can!"

"How?"

"I will watch over him day and night."

"But how can you?"

The girl's voice fell to a whisper as she said:

"I will become his wife!"

Then followed again a moment's silence; and this time it was the detective who first spoke.

"Do you love him?"

"Yes."

"And now comes another point. Have you ever promised this young man that you would marry him?"

"No, sir; he has never asked me to do so."

"Have you any guarantee that he will permit you to watch over him as you propose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I will not press my questions further in that direction. And now, what do you want me to do?"

"Loan us the money."

"Have you any idea as to the amount you will need?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what is your idea?"

"Possibly more than one or two thousand dollars."

"My child, it will take seven thousand dollars to free Frank Brumack."

"Then all is lost!"

"Hold on—all is not lost."

"Can I hope, sir?"

"Yes, you can hope."

"That means much when *you* say it, sir."

"Gussie, I have had a long talk with Frank."

"You were really trailing him?"

"No; I was trailing another man, and, strange as it may seem, the man I was trailing is the burglar who told the story of old Thatford. It is rather singular how your and this young man's lines of destiny cross."

"It is strange, sir."

"But I have a stranger revelation to make. The burglar's name is Bigelow, and this Bigelow who is seeking to find you is the man who first led Frank Brumack astray."

The girl gazed in wonderment.

"Does he know of Frank's acquaintance with me?"

"I do not think he has any accurate knowledge of you. But let me tell you; I had got on this man's trail, and, after a method of my own, I got him to finish the story, a part of which Maggie overheard."

"Oh, sir, this is strange indeed."

"Yes, it is strange, and I am satisfied that you are the child of the wreck."

"The daughter of the passenger who entered the ship at Melbourne?"

"Yes. And what is more, I am satisfied that old Thatford really did have a fortune in trust for you."

"And will it ever be recovered?"

"That we are to learn. It is buried treasure."

"How strange, sir, is all this. It seems like romance."

"It is real romance. But let me proceed. I got on to this man, as I said, and I was following him up when he met Frank. I ran close to them and overheard a part of their conversation, and I heard this man make an appointment with Frank, and then there arose in my mind an interest in the young man and I concluded to follow him. I did so, and you know what followed."

"Did you recognize me when I joined Frank?"

"I did."

"And what did you think of me, sir?"

"Well, I have a way of reaching certain conclusions, and I did so in this case."

"Oh, sir, it was a terrible scene. Had you not been present he would have killed himself."

"Yes, I really think he meant to kill himself."

"He is a very determined young man, sir, and I wonder these men ever got such an influence over him."

"Ah, child, crime will make a coward of the bravest man."

"What happened after you sent me away?"

"I took Frank, and had a long talk with him."

"And did he confess to you?"

"Yes; he confessed all to me; and now, let me tell you, he has entered my service."

"Entered your service, sir?"

"Yes. I am to meet him to-day—this morning—and within a few hours he will be a free man."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Soon after leaving the young girl Sleuth appeared in Wall Street, and on the minute to the appointed time Frank appeared.

There was a look of anxiety on the young man's face.

"You are here," said Sleuth.

"Yes, sir, I am here."

"Now, then, Frank, I wish to exchange a few words with you. If you get out of this scrape, do you think you will have strength to remain firm against all these temptations that have assailed you in the past?"

"Yes, sir, I do; but—"

The young man came to a halt.

"Well, out with it."

"I do not think it is right to let you pay this money."

"You do not think it is right, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I can not see why you should make up my defalcations. You are a stranger to me."

"We will not talk about that. I have once told you I am a friend of Miss Thatford."

"And do you do this at her request?"

"I will not say."

"You have seen her since that scene in 'e park?"

"Yes."

"And what has she said to you?"

"Young man, I do not desire to hear you mention Miss Thatford's name. As matters stand, you are an unworthy fellow. You may become a good and proper fellow some day. And now listen to me. I am not going into any long explanations, and you must not ask me any questions; but you can aid me, and in aiding me you will aid Miss Thatford."

"Will you tell me how, sir?"

"There you go asking questions."

"Forgive me."

"I will; and now, listen: Here are seven thousand dollars; settle up your account, and, after business hours, meet me."

The money was passed over, and Frank returned to his place of business.

Later in the day the young man met the detective by appointment. Meantime, the detective had been doing a little business.

The detective was a man who, when he had anything to do, kept right at it.

Upon leaving Frank the detective "got up" in proper disguise, and went down to the sailors' boarding-house, where his pal had gone as a misleader on the previous day when the detective was seeking to throw Bigelow off his track.

Sleuth entered the boarding-house, and there, sure enough, was Bigelow, and it was not long before he had given the man an "agency," as the detectives term it.

Sleuth knew well the keeper of the sailors' boarding-house, and he had set his pal to make certain arrangements. So it was all right when the detective entered the place. In fact, the first thing he did was to exchange certain signals with the keeper of the sailors' boarding-house, and the road was clear for a good game.

As stated, Bigelow, after a time, managed to engage in conversation with the detective. The fellow was in disguise, and, as our old hero had learned, the man was pretty good in going "under cover."

Bigelow talked around for awhile, and then said, in a careless way:

"There is a fellow hanging around here by the name of Brown?"

Sleuth laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I'll tell you. I reckon that old lunatic has got you on a string."

"Got me on a string?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're asking about B. T. Brown, I reckon?"

"I don't know what his initials are."

"You don't, eh?"

"No."

"I'll explain. We call him old Buried Treasure Brown."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes."

"An odd name."

"Yes. But he has earned it. He is off on the subject of buried treasure."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is just now. But he will be around here pretty soon, I guess."

"What particular form does his lunacy take?"

"He is looking for a man."

"Looking for a man?"

"Yes, some man who sailed in a brig from Melbourne a good many years ago."

"Did he ever mention the man's name?"

"No; but he has told his story to almost every one, and I suppose he has mentioned the man's name to some of them; but never to me."

"Do you know him well?"

"No; all I know about him is that he asked me a great many questions one day."

"When is it a good time to see him?"

"Well, about now, I should say. Did you ask the landlord about him?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"He says the old man is in and out—that's all."

"Is the old man getting you on a string about his treasure?"

"Not much."

"Between you and me, I've sometimes thought there might be something in that old man, after all?"

"I reckon not," said Bigelow.

"Why are you seeking him?"

"Oh! he is the friend of an old shipmate of mine, and I have a message for him."

"If you do not see him, you can leave your message with me."

"Thank you," said Bigelow.

"Will you wait for him?"

"Yes."

"All right. I think he'll be in soon."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE detective had a little purpose in his talk with Bigelow, and his design will have a bearing upon the future incidents of our narrative.

After his last remark to Bigelow the detective departed, and he went direct to the house to which he had tracked Bigelow on the previous night.

Arrived at the house, the detective took a survey, and was still studying the place when a woman came forth and sallied up the street. The woman was elegantly dressed.

"Halloo!" muttered the detective; "there she goes under full sail!"

It just suited our old hero to have the woman to shadow, and he fell to her trail, and spent an hour or two watching her movements. All his little shadowings were merely preparatory to a plan he intended to carry out later on, and he put in the day in various ways until the hour arrived for him to go and meet Frank.

The young man was waiting, and his face was radiant.

"Is it all right?"

"Yes, sir, it is all right; and the rescue came just in time."

"It did?"

"Yes, sir; there came an unexpected draft to-day, and had the seven thousand been short, the draft would have been drawn out, and the whole matter would have been exploded."

"If often happens that way," said Sleuth, and he added: "But now we'll settle down to business. You are to go in and aid me, and it may be possible that you will not appear at the store to-morrow."

"I will have to send a note then."

"That is all right. We will arrange for that; and now as to my scheme. I tell you I am on the track of this man Bigelow. It is a very important matter, and I am not fully satisfied in my own mind just how to proceed."

"And he is to open up his scheme to me?"

"Yes."

"Had I not better take in his plan and report back to you?"

"Yes, that is my idea; in fact, I had decided upon that course, and now you must play your cards well, and not give the least intimation that you are out of your trouble."

"You said he would make a proposition of robbery to me?"

"Yes."

"Shall I go into the scheme, or rather pretend to do so?"

"No; you must hold off. Tell him you want to think it over, and then come and report the whole matter to me; but you must be very careful that he does not dog you."

"I will look out for that."

"I'll tell you what you'll do. When you leave him just walk through Tompkins Square, and you will get a hint."

"From whom?"

"That is all right; the hint will come, and you will understand it well enough, and you must act then."

Sleuth gave Frank certain other instructions, and then went to his home.

Miss Thatford was on the outlook for the detective, and the latter found an opportunity to say to her:

"It is all right."

In the meantime, Frank was compelled to pass the evening in various ways until the hour arrived when he was to meet Bigelow.

A complete change had come over the feelings of the young man. All his old-time light cheeriness and anticipation had returned. The world and the faces of his fellows assumed a different appearance to him. He did not start at the sound of every strange voice nor tremble when some man looked at him rather sharply. No, no! And more, he was a free man, as good as any one, and could look any man boldly in the face. His great change from the abyss of despair to the gardens of love and happiness had come about within a few hours and under circumstances the most wonderful and extraordinary.

Frank was at the appointed place when at length he was joined by Bigelow. There was a blank look upon the burglar's face. Matters had not gone well with him. He was in a whirl. He had been balked in various directions; indeed, as matters stood, he was a knocked-out man.

"So you are on hand," he said, in a surly tone.

"Yes, I am here."

"Got any money?"

"No."

"See here, young man, don't you put on high a tone with me."

Frank's blood boiled. If he had followed his inclination at the moment he would have knocked Bigelow down, but he had his orders, and merely answered:

"All right; when you get ready, speak."

"How much are you behind in your accounts, young fellow?"

"I hardly dare think."

"No doubt you know what you are going to do about it?"

"I don't know."

"You can't conceal your little game long."

"No, I can not."

"I guess you'll go up."

"You are the last man who should say so to me."

"See here, you're impudent."

The perspiration started out of Frank's face. He drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and as he did so a note fell upon the floor. Frank was so excited he did not notice the falling of the note, and it lay open at the leg of the table near which he and Bigelow were sitting. The latter glanced down at the note, and suddenly there came a strange, wild look in his eyes. He had read the signature. The note was signed "Gussie Thatford."

"Halloo, who is that?" asked Bigelow, suddenly, and he pointed behind Frank.

The latter turned to look, and Bigelow picked up the note from the floor and hurriedly placed it in his pocket.

Frank had not noticed the movement, and as there was nobody behind him, he asked:

"Who is it you mean?"

"Oh, he's gone now; but you wait here a moment. I'll be back, and then we will talk matters over."

Bigelow went into the rear room and glanced over the note, and a strange, puzzled look settled upon his face as he muttered:

"Well, I'll be hanged if this don't get me."

The note ran as follows:

"DEAR FRANK,—I will meet you Tuesday evening at ten o'clock in Union Square Park. I have something very important to say to you. Please meet me. Yours,

"GUSSIE THATFORD."

"Well, of all the strange incidents!" again muttered Bigelow. "Hang me if that fellow ain't a jewel! I'm right on to the gal whom I've been looking for the last two years!"

With an oath Bigelow passed into the room where Frank awaited him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

As has been indicated during the course of our narrative, the man Bigelow was a pretty shrewd sort of a fellow and withal a fellow of considerable courage in his way. Upon returning to the presence of Frank Brumack, he sat down and said:

"You had an appointment last night, so you told me, when I asked you to come with me."

"Yes, but I met you later on."

"I know you did. But who was it you met before you met me?"

"It does not matter. I met you later on, as I agreed."

"Bub, you can't do anything underhand with me. I know who you met."

"All right."

"You met a lady."

"Did I?"

"Yes, and I know the lady."

"Do you?"

"Yes—or rather I used to know her—and between you and me, if that lady is a friend of yours, she can get you out of this scrape."

"How?"

"She does not know how herself, but I can tell her."

"Do so."

"I will; but the fact is, I do not know just where to find her at present. Where can I find her?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know where I can find her?"

"No."

"See here, young man, you are deceiving me."

"No, I am not."

"Yes, you are; and you had better be careful. I am a

friend of yours, but I do not mean to stand any nonsense. If I turn against you, why, you are lost, that's all."

"You forget that it was acting under your advice that I got into this scrape."

"Nonsense, don't say that to me. You are a man; no one can mislead you. I reckon you knew what you were up to all the time. You played to win, and you lost; and, like all losers, you are looking around you for some one to blame. I had nothing to do with your present position; but I think you are a pretty good fellow, and I am willing to help you out of you are game enough to be helped."

"How can you help me?"

"Your circumstances are desperate. You are a thief. That's about the size of it."

The language the young man was compelled to listen to was very humiliating, but he kept his temper. He was serving the man who had really done him a service.

In answer to Bigelow's last statement, Frank remarked:

"Yes, my circumstances do appear desperate."

"If something is not done, you go to state's prison sure!"

"I think so."

"If anything should happen—anything real startling—they would not suspect you."

"What are you getting at?"

"I'll come right down to my proposition. I'll speak plain. I've been thinking your case over. There is but one way out for you: we must go it whole hog or none. Yes, we must rob your employers right out; there is no other way to save you. Now, see here: you know the day when big collections come in—when they have big money in the safe?"

"I say I never will enter into any such scheme!"

"I said I'd talk plain to you."

"You have talked plain enough for me."

"If you don't go into this scheme, I will call upon your employers."

"And you call yourself my friend, and you coolly threaten to turn traitor?"

"It will be all right if you come into the scheme."

"There are several reasons why your scheme will not work."

"What are they?"

"It is not more than once or twice a year that there is enough cash in the safe to cover my deficiency."

"But you can make it appear that there is on the night the little job goes through. You can leave what money there is on hand in the safe, and you can pretend, after the discovery is made, that there was a great deal more there. Do you see? And in that way you will pay your debt, and at the same time make a stake of a thousand or two. It is an easy job if you go into it."

"Then you confess yourself to be a regular burglar?"

"I can act the part for the occasion," said Bigelow.

"I'll not aid you to do so."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"See here, Bigelow, I must have time to think this matter over."

"All right, you can take time to think the matter over; but do not talk with your gal. When will you see me and give me an answer?"

"To-morrow night."

"All right; meet me here to-morrow night."

Frank was glad to get away, and he started to keep his appointment with the detective, and Bigelow started to dog him, with the remark:

"I'll just track that lad; there is something in all this I do not understand."

Frank was all unconscious of the fact that he was being followed, and proceeded along, when a man suddenly jostled against him, and the jostler whispered:

"You're being followed; but it is all right. Keep right ahead to the park, and then switch, and meet me where we have made the rendezvous."

The man got it all in by speaking very rapidly, and then passed on, while Frank kept on his way, as directed. A moment later, Bigelow came stealing along, when suddenly he received a thump on the back from behind. The blow nearly knocked him off his feet; but gathering himself he turned and saw a rough-looking man standing near him.

"Halloo, pard!" cried the stranger.

"Who in thunder are you?"

"Don't you know me?"

"No, I don't."
 "Look sharp."
 "I don't want to look."
 "Oh, you don't, eh? Well, you can take it for granted; and now see here, I'm broke."
 "And you almost broke my neck."
 "That's all right; but give us a stake."
 Bigelow was angry. He wanted to follow Frank. He had no time to lose, and a scene followed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"YOU'RE broke, eh?" repeated Bigelow.
 "Yes, I am."
 "Well, you git!"
 "See here, you ain't going back on me, pal?"
 Bigelow whipped out a pistol. He planted the muzzle against the stranger's face, and said:
 "Now, I tell you, git!"

The production of the pistol had been intended as a scare; but the owner of the weapon did not know his man, and the barker was knocked aside, and Bigelow received a blow that sent him to the sidewalk. He attempted to regain his feet, but received a second clip that for a moment stunned him, while the stranger, who had knocked him down quietly walked away; but when Bigelow had recovered from the effects of the blow and had regained his feet, his assailant had disappeared.

The disconcerted burglar stood and gnashed his teeth in a rage, and he muttered:

"That was a preconcerted game played on me. There's something up! All right; it's my turn to play back, and to-morrow night I'll work a scheme that will call a blow on a few facts."

Meantime Frank had proceeded to the rendezvous, and a few moments later was joined by the great detective.

"Well, lad you are here?"
 "Yes, I am here."
 "You were not on the lookout, as I told you to be."
 "How so?"
 "That man was on your track, but I downed him," and the detective related what had occurred, and then asked:

"Did he open up his scheme?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, what is his game?"
 "You were right in your guess."

"Robbery, eh?"
 "Yes; and he told me it was Miss Thatford whom I went to meet the other night when I postponed an engagement with him."

A minute the great detective meditated, and then remarked:

"This is very strange."
 "It is strange, sir; and he seemed determined that I should bring Miss Thatford to him."
 "Did you ever mention her name to him?"
 "Never."

"And you have no idea how he learned of your acquaintance with her?"

"I have not the slightest idea."
 "This is all very important, Frank."
 "He told me he could give her a point that would enable her to aid me in case she desired to do so."
 "And you have no idea how he learned of your acquaintance with her?"

"No, sir."
 "You received a note from her a day or two ago?"
 "Yes."

"Where is it?"
 Frank felt through his pockets, and after a thorough search, exclaimed:

"I've lost the note."
 Sleuth's face brightened, and he said:
 "I see how it is. That fellow has got the note."
 "How could he get it?"
 "Which pocket did you put it in?"
 "Here."
 "And your handkerchief in the same pocket?"
 "Yes."

"Tell me just what occurred when you met Bigelow."
 Frank related every incident in detail, and when he had concluded, Sleuth, who had put every incident together, said:

"You drew it out with your handkerchief, and that fellow got hold of it."

"It does not amount to anything anyhow. I am a free man, owing to your kindness."

"That man will bend every energy now to discover through it the whereabouts of Miss Thatford."

"But why is he so anxious to find her?"

"You will learn some day. I can not tell you more, but he must never find her; and now he will let matters rest until to-morrow, and then you will meet this fellow again."

"How about the proposed robbery?"

"He may make a proposition for you to go somewhere with him, and you must go."

"Am I not likely to compromise myself?"

"Not when you are obeying my orders. Remember, you are all right with the firm."

"The fellow may call on them."

"Let him call; I will offset anything he may say, and they will find your cash all right."

"Yes, sir."

"Have your books in such shape that they will not notice that there has been a deficiency."

"An expert might find out that there had been but one item. It is doubtful if the seeming discrepancy can be explained."

"It will not come to an examination by an expert. If it does, I can pull you through. I'll match these fellows if they attempt to peach on you, but I do not think they will. It is all threat on their part."

"I am to meet you to-morrow?"

"Yes; and you must have no fear; but trust everything to me, and all will be well."

"It is strange, sir, about that fellow's anxiety to meet Miss Thatford."

"I can explain all that. I know what his game is, and I will take care of her. And now you go to your home, and to-morrow go to your business, and after business hours meet me here, and I will open up our plans for the night."

Sleuth reached his home in good time, and the following morning held another talk with Gussie Thatford, and explained to her that Frank was a free man.

Later on he started forth for another day's strategic work.

We will here say that the detective was gathering a great deal of information which it is not necessary to relate at this period in our narrative; but as our story progresses, the little facts he had accumulated will be recounted as they have a bearing upon some particular incident.

It was well on in the afternoon when Sleuth met one of his pals. To the man he gave certain instructions, and the officer straightway started to carry out his orders.

The man Bigelow, following his encounter with the great detective, had kept up a good line of thinking, and he was at his usual haunt when a man entered and took a seat near him.

A little trick was on the carpet.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE aid whom the detective had sent to carry out a little scheme was an able man. He had received his training as a detective at the hands of Old Sleuth, and he had the business down fine.

He entered the place where Bigelow sat, as stated, and did not make any pretense of acquaintanceship. He just seemed to be a stroller who was laying around with nothing particular to do. His advent attracted some attention, as the place was a notorious criminals' resort, and most of the men who gathered there were distinguished in one branch or another of crime.

Bigelow was ever on the alert. The man had reached the conclusion that a game was being played against him. He had sought the man Brown again and again, and had never been able to find him, and had at length decided that Mr. Brown was a myth; and that being the case, he naturally concluded also that in that interview he had been nicely played, as detectives say. The result was Bigelow had learned to be on his guard, and, as intimated, he closely watched the man who had entered the haunt, and in good time he approached him and said:

"I do not want to drink alone; will you join me?"
 "I don't care if I do."

"You are a stranger around here?"

The man made no answer, but winked in a significant and knowing manner. The two men sat down near to each other, and Bigelow returned to the attack.

"I've never seen you around before," and again the man winked.

"What's your game?" asked Bigelow.

The man reached over and whispered:

"Business."

"Eh? Can I ask your business?"

The man looked Bigelow all over, and after a moment said:

"Possibly you can help me."

"Help you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I'm after a little information."

"Well, what do you want to know?"

"You will keep what I say a secret?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Did you ever see a young man lounging around here that looks like—"

The man proceeded, and in the most accurate manner described Frank Brumack.

"I've seen such a young fellow around here, yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"He appears to be a pretty nice kind of a young fellow."

"Did you ever see him do anything out of the way?"

"Will you tell me who you are, sir?"

"Oh, I am a friend of this young man."

"What is his name?"

"What name do you know him by?" demanded the stranger.

"Frank Brumack."

"Does he come here often?"

"Only occasionally."

"And what are his general habits?"

"See here, my friend, you are making very particular inquiries."

"Yes, I am."

"Will you tell me why you are so particular in your inquiries about this young man?"

"I am very particular."

"I can give you some very important information about him."

"Of what nature?"

"I know all about him."

"Then you are just the man I am glad to meet."

"I'm your man if you are seeking any information about young Frank Brumack."

"I wish to learn all I can about him."

"Then you must tell me who you are."

"My name is Smith."

"That's all right, Mr. Smith. But why are you seeking all this information?"

"You say you are a friend of this young man?"

"Yes, an acquaintance," answered Bigelow, guardedly.

"You might repeat to him what I say to you?"

"No, I will not, if you desire secrecy."

"The fact is, sir, this young man is engaged to marry a young friend of mine."

"Is she a relative of yours?"

"No, only a friend."

"Why do you take such a deep interest in her affairs?"

"Well, sir, she is a helpless orphan. Her father was murdered some years ago in a cabin down on the beach."

Bigelow gave a start, and mentally he exclaimed:

"Great Scott! what have I tumbled against?" Then aloud, he said: "Her father was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Who told you her father was murdered?"

"She told me herself."

"Did she tell you all the circumstances of the murder?"

"No; because she was very young when it occurred."

"And this young lady is engaged to be married to young Brumack?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think I know the young lady."

"You do?"

"Her name is Thatford."

The man gave a start, and exclaimed:

"Well, I declare!"

"That is her name?"

"Yes, sir."

"You do not desire to see her marry an unworthy man?"

"That is the truth, sir."

"And that is why you are making inquiries about young Brumack?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are wise to do so, and no man in New York knows more about him than I do."

"How fortunate that I should meet you!"

"Yes; but how is it you come here to make inquiries about him?"

"I hardly like to tell."

"Yes, you must tell me."

"Well, sir, I've been, as the detectives say, shadowing him."

"And you have shadowed him to this place?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was he here last?"

"He was here last night, sir."

"At what hour?"

The stranger named the hour.

Bigelow looked the man all over, and after a moment said:

"You're a sneaking fraud."

The man leaped to his feet, and made a movement as though to rush from the place, when Bigelow seized him and said, with a laugh:

"Hold on; I've something to tell you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BIGELOW, in calling the man a sneaking fraud so abruptly, had a purpose in doing so, and when the man started to run away with such well-assumed terror and alarm, Bigelow appeared to be satisfied, and he, as related at the close of the preceding chapter, called the man back.

It was in a very hesitating manner that the man resumed his seat.

"You must excuse me," said Bigelow.

"But you are very rude, sir."

"I will explain later on. And now I wish to ask you a few questions."

"I am afraid to answer any questions, sir."

"You need not be afraid to answer any questions. You will find, in the end, that I will give you some very useful information—some very important information; but I must first be assured that you are really a friend of Miss Thatford."

"Ah, you do know her?"

"I know of her, sir."

"Will you take me to see this young lady?"

The man pretended to think a moment, and at length said:

"I would hardly dare do that."

"It is very important for her that I should see her."

"I will ask her, sir, and if she consents I will take you to her."

"Go now and ask her at once!"

"I will."

"Then you will meet me later?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here, if you say so."

"Yes, let it be here. But if Brumack should be here you must not speak to me nor let him know that we are acquainted."

"If he is here I would not dare enter. I do not wish him to see me here."

"I do not think he will be here. I only desired to warn you against a possibility."

Smith went away, and Bigelow started to follow him, and a few squares off Smith met a lady—a young lady, evidently—who was closely veiled.

He exchanged a few words with her, and the two walked off together, and finally Smith put the girl on a car. Then turning round he walked straight in a certain direction, coming upon Bigelow, and pretending that the meeting was accidental, he exclaimed:

"Halloo! How funny that I should have met you. I wish I had met you a moment sooner, and I would have introduced you to Miss Thatford."

"That was Miss Thatford you placed on the car?"
 "Yes. To tell you the truth she was very anxious as concerned my inquiries about Brumack, and she was waiting for me all the time I was talking to you."
 The man spoke in such an innocent and frank, straightforward manner that he disarmed even the subtle Bigelow of any suspicions he might have entertained.

"We can follow her," said Bigelow.
 "No, that will not do."
 "Did you ask about the interview with me?"
 "No, I did not; but I am to meet her later on. I have another appointment, and I was unable to give her any more time at present."

"You are to meet her later on?"
 "Yes; and then I will speak to her about the interview with you. I have no doubt she will be as anxious to meet you as you are to meet her."

"And where will you meet me?"
 "Where we agreed to meet. And now, sir, I must bid you good-day."

Bigelow would like to have followed the young lady, but the man Smith while talking had actually held him. The car got far away, and several cars had passed since.

The two men separated, and Bigelow disarmed of all suspicion, did not follow Smith, and returned to the rendezvous.

Smith soon learned that he was not being shadowed, and proceeded direct to where he was to meet the detective, and, when entering the latter's presence, he merely remarked:
 "It's all right."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE detective and his aid held a long consultation, the latter explaining all that had occurred; and when he had concluded, Sleuth said:

"I have arranged the other end of it, so it is all right. We will have some rare fun. When are you to meet him?"
 "At six o'clock."

"All right; I will keep matters moving while you carry out the little game."

At the appointed hour the man Smith met Bigelow, and was greeted with the remark:

"It is well you came."
 "I promised to come."
 "That is all right. And how about my seeing the girl?"
 "You really have an important communication to make?"

"I have."
 "The young lady will meet you."
 "When shall we start?"
 "I will meet you at nine o'clock."

At nine o'clock Smith appeared at the appointed place, and led the man Bigelow to a plain little house located on a street near to the East River. Before entering, Bigelow said:

"I must see the lady alone."
 "Yes."
 "For whom must I inquire?"
 "Miss Thatford; but I will tell you she will open the door herself, as she expects you."
 "There is one thing," said Bigelow: "if there is any funny business in this matter it will go hard with some one."

The man Smith made no reply, and a few moments later Bigelow rang the bell of a modest appearing little house, and the door was opened by a very plain-faced young lady.

"This is Miss Thatford?" said Bigelow.
 "Walk in," said the lady.
 The latter showed her visitor into a neatly furnished little parlor, and asked him to take a seat.

"Miss Thatford," said Bigelow, "I have a very important communication to make to you."
 "So I have been informed, sir."

"Before making the communication I must be assured that you are really the lady entitled to it. You must furnish me some evidence that you are Miss Thatford."

"If you have come here for information you will go away disappointed. I have no information to give, and I will be perfectly frank with you. It was with a great deal of reluctance that I consented to this interview."

"Indeed! Why?"

"I am assured that I have a secret enemy here in New York."

"You are assured that you have a secret enemy here in New York?" repeated Bigelow.

"Yes, sir."
 "Your friend, Mr. Smith, did not say anything to me about a secret enemy."

"No; simply because I have never made a confidant of Mr. Smith."

"And he doesn't know that you have a secret enemy?"
 "No, sir."

"And you confess to me your fear?"
 "Yes, sir."

"Why?"
 "I want you to know that I am on my guard, and that I have taken all necessary precautions to defend and protect myself."

"Miss Thatford, I am your friend."
 "Indeed, sir, I never saw you before."

"That is true; but in the end you will understand why I am your friend. But tell me about this secret foe."

"As I have said so much to you, I will confess more. My father was murdered."

"Your father was murdered, miss?"
 "Yes."

"Well, well! And what has that to do with you secret enemy?"

"I can tell you no more; but I have reason to believe that the man who was my father's enemy is mine also."

"Where did your father live?"
 "On Long Island."

"And what were the circumstances of his death?"
 "I was but a mere child at the time of his death, and it is only recently that I came to know, or rather to suspect, that he was murdered."

"You were but a child?"
 "Yes."

"What do you remember concerning your father?"
 "Very little; only that he was kind and good. It is terrible to think that he was murdered."

"Have you any suspicion as to who murdered your father?"

"I have nothing to say on that subject."

"Did your father leave any property?"
 "Certainly not. He was a poor fisherman."

"He was a poor fisherman, eh?"
 "Yes, sir."

"And he left no estate?"
 "No, sir. He had nothing to leave."

"Miss Thatford, you did not understand when I told you I was your friend."

"No, sir, I did not."

"You will understand better when I tell you that I was your father's friend."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, your father was a sailor, and I sailed with him—sailed with him as man and boy. I loved your father. He was always a good friend to me."

"He was a good, kind friend."

"Indeed he was. And it was because I loved him so well, and was under so many obligations to him that I consider myself your best friend. I have a revelation to make."

"So I was led to believe."
 "Yes, I have a great revelation to make."

"I am ready, sir, to listen to any revelation you have to make."

"You will be amazed.
 The young lady remained silent, and Bigelow repeated:

"Yes, you will be amazed. You think your father died poor?"

"Yes, sir."
 "You have no idea that he left you any property?"

"I know he did not, sir."
 "You know he did not?"

"Yes, sir."
 "My dear young lady, you are mistaken."

The young lady gazed in amazement, and Bigelow said:
 "I knew you would be amazed. Listen to what I alone am able to reveal. You are a great heiress—yes, miss, the heir to millions!"

There followed a moment's silence, broken at length by Bigelow, who reiterated the startling declaration:

"Yes," said he, "you are heir to millions, and I am the

only man who knows it and who can put you in possession of the fortune."

"But what proof have you that I am really the heiress?"

"I am fully satisfied that you are the legitimate heiress. Do not delay longer; come with me at once."

The girl still hesitated, and she did it in a most natural manner.

We will say to our readers that we have given but an outline of the conversation that passed simply to indicate the plan of Bigelow. The man used all manner of persuasions, and finally, in a hesitating manner, the girl said:

"I will go with you, and trust that you are not deceiving me."

"Miss, I'd die before I'd deceive you! I will confess I have an interest in saving this fortune to you, for when once in possession you will not let me go unrewarded."

"Certainly not, sir; and now, if you will wait a moment, I will prepare to accompany you."

Bigelow's heart bounded. His scheme, he believed, was working all right.

CHAPTER XL.

THE man Bigelow paced the floor to and fro until the girl rejoined him, and when she came she said:

"No one must know that I have been so foolish as to go with you."

"Certainly; I am as anxious as yourself to conceal the fact of your visit to my house."

"I know I am very foolish."

"You will congratulate yourself the balance of your life."

"We must not leave the house together."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Smith will be on the lookout. He suspects that possibly all may not be right. He will come in to see me the moment you are gone."

"Well?"

"I must get rid of him."

"Well?"

"You can watch and see him go away."

"Well?"

"And then come to the door and I will go with you."

"Miss, can it be possible that you have any plan to deceive me?"

"No."

"And I will find you here?"

"Yes."

"Prepared to go with me?"

"Yes; having made up my mind to go, nothing shall deter me."

Bigelow left the house, and pretended to walk away, and as the girl had predicted, a moment later the man Smith entered the house.

"Well?" he asked, in the usual interrogatory tone.

"It's all right," was the answer.

"What did he tell you?"

"Nothing yet. He has invited me to his house."

"When?"

"I am to go at once."

"You may have consented too easily."

"No, no."

"And what is to follow?"

"We must wait and learn."

"Signals are in order."

"Yes; and now go. I am to meet him at once."

Smith went away, and after an interval, the girl appeared at the door. The man Bigelow was at hand.

"I am glad you have come."

"We must move quickly, as I must soon return."

Bigelow was a happy man, as he walked beside the girl, whom he felt he had at last got in his power through a lucky incident. He led the way to his house, and the girl was shown to a room on the top floor. She betrayed no fear, but seemed to have perfect confidence in her guide. Having shown the girl to the room, Bigelow excused himself a moment, and left his guest alone, and the latter permitted a strange smile to flit across her face.

The moment the man was out of the room a strange incident occurred. The girl drew a pistol from her pocket and examined it carefully, and then restoring it to her pocket, she commenced to glance around the room, and

her glance fell upon an old black trunk, and in a low tone, she ejaculated:

"Great guns, what is this!"

She advanced to the trunk and made a careful study of it, and tried to raise the lid, but the trunk was locked, and she was about to make another effort to open it when she heard steps, and returning to her seat, was just in time to receive, in a demure manner, Bigelow, as he entered the room. The man's manner, as the girl discovered, had undergone a change, and he boldly locked the door.

"Why do you lock that door?" the girl cried, rising in alarm.

"I do not wish to be disturbed!"

"But who can disturb you? Are you not in your own house?"

"Yes."

"Unlock that door, sir!"

"The door is all right."

"I fear you have deceived me."

"No, it's all right. I am your friend, but I must take most decided measures. You have many enemies, but I will protect you. I have a proposition to make."

"I did not come here to listen to propositions. I came here to listen to facts concerning myself and to see proofs of your statements."

"That's all right. But this is a very important matter."

"I am sorry I came here."

"Are you?"

"I am. And I shall go away."

"Oh, no, you will not go away!"

"Then you must make good the promise that brought me here."

"I will. But first I will ask you a few questions. Are you deeply in love with this young man Frank?"

"I am not in love with any one."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"I do not see what difference it can make to you."

"You will in a moment. Now listen. You are heiress to a large fortune. I possess the secret as to the whereabouts of that fortune. Without my aid you can not get it; no one can get it. And without your aid the fortune will be of no benefit to me."

"You talk in a very strange manner."

"Yes; but I will make all plain enough in good time."

"I wish you would speak plainly at once."

"But I desire that you should fully understand the situation."

"I think I understand it as well now as I can."

"Do you understand that I alone possess the secret of the fortune?"

"I understand that you so claim."

"Do you understand that I alone possess the proofs of your identity?"

"So you claim."

"It is true."

"Well?"

"You knew nothing of this fortune until I informed you concerning it?"

"That may be true."

"You believed old Thatford to be your father?"

"Well?"

"I possess the proofs of your real identity."

"Why not furnish them to me at once? Why waste time?"

"Our interests are one."

"How so?"

"You get nothing but through me."

"You claim to be my friend?"

"I am more than your friend."

The girl pretended to start in surprise, and permitted a look of amazement to radiate her face.

"Speak—speak!" she cried.

"I am speaking."

"But tell me the truth."

"What do you suspect?"

"Are you my father?"

The man laughed.

"You are not my father?"

"Your father? Nonsense! I am but a few years older than yourself."

"Are you my brother?"

"Well, well; this is a strange question! What makes you think I am your brother?"

"I do not know; but your words are so suggestive."

"I may be your brother."

There came a thoughtful look to the man's face. An idea evidently was running through his mind—he had received a suggestion. But after a moment he said:

"I am not your brother."

"Then how is it you are so identified with my interests?"

"I have told you I possess the secret."

"You can reveal it?"

"I will; but first I will make a confession."

"Do so."

"Gussie, I love you!"

CHAPTER XLI.

UPON hearing the man's declaration the girl leaped to her feet, a look of consternation overspread her face, and she was seized with a fit of trembling.

"Your declaration is that of a madman."

"Not when you look at it in a proper light."

"But, sir, you have a wife."

The man started.

"I have a wife?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean? What do you know about my affairs?"

"But do you forget when you asked me to come here you told me you had a wife, and she would receive me?"

"Did I tell you that?"

"You did."

"It's all right. I may have told you that in order to get you to come here; but if I had a wife I would not tell you I loved you."

"I am sorry you have told me."

"It makes no difference; it is true; and had I not loved you I would not interest myself in your behalf. I will tell you something. This fortune of yours is already in my possession. Now you see what a miserable man I am. If you will become my wife we will be rich and happy. We will go to Europe and live like prince and princess. I will devote my life to you. The fortune is yours already."

"I can not wed you."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"I must have time to think."

"You need no time to think. I will have a clergyman here to-night. You will become my wife, and all will be well."

"Sir, your proposition is preposterous."

"Nonsense! People have married at sight under less remarkable circumstances. The conditions demand that we marry at once."

Again the girl showed signs of astonishment, and exclaimed:

"But I must think and talk this matter over with some one else."

"Mr. Smith, I suspect?"

"No."

"This young man Frank?"

"No."

"With whom?"

"A friend."

"I thought you had no friends?"

"I have one."

"Who is it?"

"A lady."

The man laughed, and said:

"You can make up your mind at once."

"Then I refuse to become your wife!"

"But you must!"

"Why, sir?"

"I have revealed my secret to you. No one else shall benefit by the secret I have maintained so many years. Remember, I have searched for you the world over, and during this search I have carried your image in my heart."

"How could you, having never seen me?"

"Yes, I did see you once."

"When?"

"When you were a little girl. All these years I have pictured you as you grew to womanhood, and each year my love became more and more intense, until now I love you madly and wildly. I can not, I will not give you up!"

"I may learn to love you in return."

"You must, you shall love me!"

"But I must have time."

"You must become my wife to-night."

Suddenly the girl changed the conversation in a most singular manner. She asked:

"Where did you get that trunk?"

The man started and quickly demanded:

"What interest have you in that trunk?"

"I have seen it before."

"Where?"

"It belonged to the man whom for years I believed to be my father."

"You remember it?"

"I do."

"Did you ever see it anywhere else?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the house of the man who later on claimed to be my adopted father."

"Then you know I have been telling you the truth, that indeed I am well acquainted with all the facts of your history."

"It would appear so."

"And now you see why you must become my wife!"

"I can not."

"You will compel me to speak plainly."

"I desire that you should."

"You become my wife or my prisoner."

"Your wife or your prisoner!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes."

"What right have you to present such an alternative?"

"I have told you. The secret I've held for years I have revealed. I love you, and the fortune I have preserved is by right partly mine. Will you marry me?"

"No!" came the answer.

CHAPTER XLII.

BIGELOW merely smiled when he received the emphatic no, but after a moment he said:

"You will think better of my proposition later on."

"I will never think better of your proposition. I am now convinced that you have deceived me. You have inveigled me here for some purpose of your own; but I do not fear you. I shall go away. You say I have enemies; you will learn that I have friends, also."

"I am your friend."

"You are my friend?"

"Yes."

"Then open that door and permit me to return whence I came."

"You can not leave here until you become my wife. I love you!"

"Nonsense! please do not mention your ridiculous love again."

"You consider my love ridiculous?"

"I do. And I demand that you open that door!"

"Listen! If I do, you will lose a fortune."

"I believe your whole tale to be false."

"What object would I have in telling you this story?"

"I do not know; but I am convinced you have some scheme of your own."

"Scheme, do you say?"

"Yes; I say scheme. And again I demand that you open that door."

The girl moved toward the door, when Bigelow leaped to his feet and grasped her by the arm. She sprang away and cried:

"Do not dare to touch me!"

"You forget."

"What?"

"The fortune. The secret is mine alone. If you do not accept my proposition there are others who will."

"You should have gone to the others first."

"One word: everything I have told you is the truth."

"I do not believe one word you have told me."

"If I convince you, will you become my wife?"

"I will make no bargain."

"Ah, you pretend to be very innocent. You say what I have told you is false; but a suspicion runs through my mind that you have not been truthful. You have spoken falsely."

"I care not what you believe. Open that door!"

"That door shall be opened when you change your tone"

toward me, and you may as well know the truth now. You can not leave this house. You shall never leave it unless you become my wife. I have spent all these years looking for you. I have held the fortune intact. I do not mean to surrender it."

"Then you confess that it is the fortune you love?"

"I love you, and I am determined to have the fortune."

"Then take the fortune without me."

"You surrender the fortune?"

"I have no fortune to surrender."

The man approached close to the girl's ear and whispered:

"There is more to save than the fortune—your life is in danger!"

"Ah! you threaten my life?"

"No; but you need a friend. Should your enemies discover your whereabouts, they would kill you. Yes, your life stands between them and the fortune. Think well; do not make an enemy of me, or I may tell them where to find you."

"You can tell them what you choose."

"You do not know what you say."

"I am willing to abide by my declaration. I defy you! Open that door!"

"No; you are my prisoner."

"I shall call for help."

"I will not permit you to call for help."

"You can not prevent me."

"I will!"

The girl made a movement as though to sound an alarm, when a second time Bigelow seized hold of her, and with a show of greater violence than before.

"Unhand me!" cried the girl.

The man drew her face toward him. He bent toward her; his lips closed for a kiss, when suddenly he fell back; a cry issued from his lips; he staggered an instant, and then rolled heavily to the floor.

The expression upon the girl's face had changed. There came a gleam to her eyes, and her beautiful features worked with excitement. As the man fell she ran to his side, at the same moment drawing from her pocket a pair of handcuffs. These she placed upon his wrists, and as she deftly inserted a gag in his mouth; and then she sat down a moment and waited.

She did not wait long ere the man's eyes opened, and as he glanced around there came a dazed look to his eyes. He sought to move his hands, and learned that he was manacled, and also realized that he was securely gagged.

"You thought to take advantage of me, eh?" came the question from the girl.

She laughed in a sarcastic manner, and going to the man, took the key of the room from his pocket, and again she spoke:

"I can leave at my leisure now."

The man made a motion with his manacled hands, and there came a pleading look to his eyes.

"You want the gag out of your mouth?"

The man signified with his head that he did.

"Will you promise to keep quiet?"

The man signified in the affirmative.

"First let me tell you something," said the mysterious and resolute girl. "I have assistance at hand. You've tricked yourself, and you may as well make the best of it. But remember, if you attempt an alarm it will be bad for you!"

The girl removed the gag and for some minutes the man was unable to articulate, but at length he managed to ask:

"What does this mean?"

"That is the question I was about to propound to you."

"Who are you?"

Again the girl laughed and said:

"I am certainly a match for you."

"I have been tricked!" cried the man.

"You sought to trick me."

"Who are you?"

"Guess."

"Tell me who you are!"

"I don't think you ever saw me before. The information would not help you."

"Tell me what it all means."

"I will on one condition."

"Name your condition."

"You are to tell me what all this story about a fortune

means. You are to tell me who Gussie Thatford is, and why you are so anxious to commit bigamy. You see I know you."

"But first let me know to whom I make the revelation."

"Tom Bigelow, the detectives have long been on your track. You are caught at last. We have your record."

The man's face assumed a ghastly hue as he exclaimed:

"You are a decoy?"

"That's what I am," came the answer.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THERE followed a moment's silence, and during the interval strange and varied expressions passed over Bigelow's face. The man was sadly perplexed. He could solve in his own mind the mystery. He saw that he had misled himself, and in the end had been sadly misled by some mysterious personage.

"On what charge have you been running on me?" he at length asked.

"Old man, there are a dozen charges against you. But we have been closing in on you for the last little job. We've got all the facts."

"Can I buy you off?"

"You put it straight; but what will you buy with, old man?"

"I might raise the dimes."

"Oh, if you were only a bachelor!" said the girl, with a smile. "Just to think of it, I've got a genuine offer of marriage at last, and you've been loving me all these years. But come, tell me your story. I may go in with you."

Bigelow's mind had been busy, and as he thought matters over he began to discover that there was some connection between the girl who had so wonderfully duped him and Gussie Thatford. Indeed, it began to run through his mind that he might really be talking to Miss Thatford after all; otherwise, how was it that she had known certain facts? for she certainly had betrayed a knowledge of circumstances that she would not have "caught on to" within a few moments, as the detectives say.

"You fooled me once," said the man at length.

"Well?"

"You can not do it again."

"I am not seeking to fool you; it was you who sought to fool me. Come, tell me about that fortune."

"I've nothing to tell you."

"You refuse?"

"You know it all."

"I know it all?"

"Yes."

"What an idea!"

"I've been fooled once; I can not be fooled again. You can get no information from me. But there is one thing certain: I told the truth."

"You told the truth?"

"Yes."

"About what?"

"I am the only man who holds the secret as concerns the fortune."

"What fortune?"

"Oh, it's all right. You are not running Tom Bigelow on his little record. You're in with the gang who are seeking to get on to my secret. I've got the whole business now."

"You think you're got the whole business, eh?"

"Yes, I have."

"And I've got you. I can turn you over, and you go to Sing Sing. How about the secret then?"

The man's face assumed a hang-dog expression as he answered:

"I can keep my secret all the same."

"You told me I was your prisoner?"

"I made a mistake; I own up."

"You are surely my prisoner, and I make no mistake; and now see here, Tom Bigelow, if you want a chance to get away and breathe free air for the next twenty years just open up and tell me your story."

"I'll tell you nothing."

"All right, I'll investigate. I've an idea that I may get the proof of some of the crimes from that trunk."

The girl pointed to the old black trunk, and Bigelow's evident consternation encouraged her.

"You can open that trunk if you choose," he said, in an indifferent tone.

"I propose to open it; and now let me tell you something. We've been on your track for a long time. We've got all your pals located. We've got all the proofs, and I will tell you frankly there is but one way for you to save yourself from going up."

"What can I do?"

"Tell me all you know. Give me all the points on this fortune business."

"I thought you knew nothing about this fortune?"

"Can't you see I am trying to get some information?"

"Yes; and I see it is on that business you have been shadowing me. Some one has been on my track, I admit, and they have played their game well. But I can't talk to you. Send your principal here. I'll talk to him."

"You will talk to me!"

"Not another word."

The girl went to the door of the room and opened it, and in walked Mr. Smith. And when Bigelow's eyes fell upon that quiet individual he winked and blinked in the most amusing manner.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, in his aforetime well-assumed tones of meekness.

Bigelow glanced at Old Sleuth's aid.

"Well, well," repeated Smith, "what does this all mean?"

"It means," said Bigelow, "that you played your game pretty well. But you have not made anything out of it, yet, nor will you. Yes, you've played your game, but I've a card or two left."

"Don't talk about cards, sir. You shock me."

Even Bigelow smiled—the man acted the meek and humble so well.

"Sit down, Mr. Smith," said the girl.

Smith sat down and looked as meek as a genuine Uriah Heep.

"Now then, Mr. Bigelow, open up," said the girl.

"I've nothing to say," came the answer.

"You've nothing to say?"

"Nothing."

"Mr. Smith can become aroused."

"Indeed!"

"When he does he is a lion."

"Ah, is it possible?"

Bigelow was what the detectives call a "dandy." He was a very young man, and he had become in his tone and manner as facetious as the young lady who had tricked him so nicely.

"Mr. Bigelow, Mr. Smith can become aroused, and if he does he will take you to the Tombs."

"What can I do to keep Mr. Smith in a tame condition?"

"Own up everything."

"I've nothing to own up."

"You stand on that?"

"I do."

"Mr. Smith," said the girl, "take him away, and I'll attend to the trunk."

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN his meek manner Mr. Smith said to the man Bigelow:

"I will assist you into the adjoining room."

Bigelow writhed in spirit—if facial expressions serve as indexes—but he evidently knew it was useless to protest. Curses rose to his lips, but they were not spoken. The man realized that he had been tricked by some secret shadower, who had made every move with exact precision. He was led from the room, and the girl was alone.

To our readers we will here explain a seeming mystery. The whole series of incidents we have recorded were arranged by Old Sleuth. The girl, as we have designated the female who played so well her part, was a famous female detective. We say famous, but will modify, and say famous among the secret service detectives. She was known as the Countess, and her *soubriquet* followed the fact of her name, which was Lecount. Belle Lecount had led a varied career. At an early age she had been left a hapless orphan, and was consigned to a public institution, where she received her education, and from which, in time, she escaped, starting out in the world to make her own fortune. She had been a variety actress, a chorus singer

in an opera company, a female circus rider, and lastly a detective's aid and decoy—and in the latter vocation she had proved herself a remarkable genius. She was handsome, brave, and, for a woman, singularly strong—indeed, a perfect female athlete. She was well used to the handling of weapons, versed in the art of disguise, and in every way a most singular and remarkable woman.

Sleuth had employed the Countess on many occasions, and she had always proved herself bright, efficient and faithful, and when he needed a woman to carry out a certain scheme in the case he had on hand he called upon the wonderful little lady whom we have described.

When the Countess started in to gain an entrance into Bigelow's house she had only expected to shadow around and pick up a few points—just see how the land lay in the burglar's dove-cote; but once in the house, after having cast her eyes upon that mysterious black trunk, her whole plan of operations was changed.

Sleuth had told her the story of Gussie Thatford so she would know in what direction to search, and, as stated, when her eyes fell upon the trunk she concluded she had fallen upon a great link in the chain of evidence that was to lead up to the discovery of the hidden treasure.

The moment Bigelow was led from the room the Countess set to work.

The trunk was securely locked, but a lock on a trunk was but a small barrier to the skillful woman. She drew a little cartridge from her pocket, inserted it in the key opening, punctured it with a steel, and there followed a slight explosion; but the lock was shattered, and the trunk lid was easily raised. The next instant the explorer was delving into the midst of quite a collection of old papers and manuscripts. She did not stop to read them in detail, she merely glanced them over, and learned that some of them at least related to the history of the girl Gussie Thatford, and others to a history of the hidden treasure.

Having satisfied herself as to the latter fact, the Countess gathered up all the papers into a bundle, and muttered:

"Now I reckon I'm ready to depart in peace."

The Countess proceeded to the adjoining room, where Smith held watch and ward over the man Bigelow, and addressing the latter, she asked:

"Are you still ready to marry me, Bigelow?"

The man's eyes flashed with rage as he answered:

"It has been your turn; my turn will come!"

"And what will you do when your turn comes?"

"Wait and see."

"So you threaten me, eh?"

"Wait and see."

"Well, good-day. I will wait," and addressing Smith, she said: "At your leisure, Mr. Smith, you can follow me. I will await the madame at her own home."

The Countess passed from the room and the house, and after an interval Smith said, addressing Bigelow:

"My friend, I am going to take the liberty of advising you."

"I do not need or desire your advice."

"You may not desire it, but you need it, old fellow."

Mr. Smith's manner had changed.

"I neither need it nor desire it, as I told you. And, let me add, my day will come."

"Yes; your day will come if you are found in New York after to-morrow noon. We give you that time to get away. We have reasons for letting you 'git,' but if you remain we will send you in another direction. Don't make any mistake, old man; we've got your record, got you dead to rights, but, as I said, there are reasons why we will let you go if you so elect."

"Ah! you have reasons for letting me go?"

"Yes."

"I think I know the reasons."

"Possibly you do."

"You want to get me out of the way."

"That is about the size of it."

"I won't go."

"As you please. If you don't go, we will take you. Now mark well what I say: if you are found in New York after to-morrow noon, on go the nippers for the rest of your natural life."

Smith, at the conclusion of his remarks, advanced and removed the handcuffs from the prisoner's wrists, and said:

"You see I propose to give you a fair chance."

"No, thanks."
 "I am not looking for thanks. I am not letting you go for your own sake; but it matters not; you can do as you choose. If you do not go, as I said, we will send you on the journey laid out for you by a criminal judge. Don't be a fool, old man. You know what your record is, and when you know we are on to it you will understand what is your best course, but you can take chances if you so choose."
 "I've a word to say."
 "Pitch in."
 "That woman has been through that trunk?"
 "Yes."
 "The breaking open of that trunk was a burglary."
 Smith merely laughed.
 "Oh, you need not fear. I do not propose to ruin that scheme."
 "I should hope not."
 "All I have to say is that the most important papers are not in that trunk."
 "All right."
 "I have the papers."
 "Well?"
 "You fellows can deal with me."
 "We have had all the dealings we desire with you, old man."
 "Are you the principal in this case?"
 "Suppose I am?"
 "I do not believe you are."
 "Suppose I am?"
 "I have a proposition to make."
 "Sail in."
 "Let me into the scheme and I will give information that will lead to the discovery of the gold."
 Smith was thoughtful a moment, and then said:
 "I will report what you say."
 "And when will I see you?"
 "I will call on you. We have you shadowed. Good-night."

CHAPTER XLV.

AN hour following the incidents we have described, Sleuth, the great detective, was seated in the room where he had appointed to meet his aid. He was lost in deep thought when he was disturbed by the entrance of the young man Frank.

"Well, young man," said the detective, "you are on hand."

"Yes, sir."
 "Did you meet Bigelow?"
 "I thought I would see you first."
 "Probably it is well you did. Sit down; I am expecting a report."

A few moments passed and Smith entered the room. He glanced at Frank, and Sleuth said:

"It's all right. Talk as though he weren't here."
 "The Countess is a trump. She has carried through the scheme."

"She met the man?"
 "Yes."
 "Tell me the story."
 Smith related all that had occurred.
 "And where is she?" asked the detective.
 "She awaits you at your home."
 "Good. I will go there."

The detective bid Smith and Frank good-night, and proceeded toward his home. In the meantime, Frank had been revolving a certain proposition in his mind. There came to him a remembrance of all he had suffered at the hands of the fellow Bigelow. Smith had stated that he would report back to the burglar, and, after a moment, Frank said:

"You are to meet Bigelow?"
 "Yes."
 "Can I act in your place?"
 "What will you report?"
 "Whatever you direct me to say."
 "You have a purpose?"
 "I desire to meet him."
 "Can you do it?"
 "I will take the chances."

"All right. You can tell him that Mr. Smith says we have no further use for him."

"That is all I am to say?"
 "Yes."
 "All right; I will carry the message."
 "You must be on your guard."
 "You need have no fear."
 "The boss may not approve of your design."
 "He understood me."
 "You think so?"
 "I know it."

"All right; when he approves you can not go far astray. But again let me warn you, be on your guard. Bigelow is a dangerous fellow."

"So much the better. I know him well, however."
 It was fully two hours later when Bigelow entered the resort where he was wont to meet the young man Frank. He had been there but a minute when a boy entered, approached him, and asked:

"Is your name Bigelow?"
 The man did not answer as to his name, but put a question in return:

"What do you want?"
 "A gentleman wishes to see you."
 "Who is the gentleman?"
 "His name is Smith."
 "Where is he?"
 "I am to lead you to him."

The burglar thought over the matter a moment. He had been fooled so often, and had been run into so many snaps, as he called them, he had learned to be a little cautious.

"Why didn't Mr. Smith come here if he desired to see me?"

"He told me to tell you that if you desired his report you must come to him."

"There's some game in this," muttered Bigelow.

"Will you come?" demanded the lad.

"No. If Mr. Smith wants to see me he must come here."

"It's all right; he did not expect you to come."

"He did not expect me to come?"

"No."
 "Did he say it to you?"
 "Yes."

"To whom?"
 "He was talking to himself, and he muttered, 'He will not come.' So I know he did not expect you."

"What more did he say?"

"Oh, I heard him mutter he did not care whether you came or not."

Again Bigelow studied a moment, and finally said:

"I reckon I will go with you."
 "I guess you'd better," said the lad.
 "Go on; I'll follow."
 "All right, sir; come along."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE lad led the way to a remote corner of a well-known park on the east side, and said:

"Wait here, and your man will be on hand in a few moments."

Bigelow felt rather uneasy, and paced to and fro in a restless manner; and after some few moments had made up his mind to steal away, when he saw a figure approaching.

The latter appeared to be a man under the influence of liquor. He staggered right along until he came abreast of Bigelow, when he came to a full stop, and, while swaying from side to side, appeared to be seeking to discern Bigelow's identity, and finally he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be shot!"
 Bigelow at first did not recognize the man, and the latter at length exclaimed:

"What are you doing here? I'm glad to meet you."
 "Who are you?"
 "Ha, ha! You ought to know me."
 "Is this Frank?"
 "It is."
 "What are you doing here?"
 "I'm walking it off."
 "Walking what off, old man?"
 "Desperation."

"What are you desperate about?"

"You, of all men, ought to know what I am desperate about."

Bigelow laughed, and said:

"So you're desperate, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Desperate men do wise things sometimes."

"I know they do. See here."

Frank displayed a roll of bills, and Bigelow's eyes glistened. He approached close to the young man, and said:

"Been knocking down, I see."

"Yes, and I'm going to do some more knocking down."

"That's right, my lad! Now you're learning good sense."

"Yes, I think I am learning good sense at last."

"Don't get huffy."

"I'm not huffy, I'm delighted—yes, delighted to meet you."

"So am I glad to meet you. May be you remember—"

"I owe you something. Yes, I do remember that, sir."

"I suppose you will settle?"

"Yes; I am prepared to settle accounts with you."

There was a singular significance to the young man's tones, and Bigelow looked at him sharply.

"Hand over," he said.

"I will hand over in good time. But, Bigelow, I've something to tell you first."

"Talk quick."

"Why?"

"I am to meet some one."

"Ah! you've plenty of time."

"Don't talk to me in that way. I know my business."

The appearance of intoxication suddenly vanished, and Frank said:

"Bigelow, you're a villain!"

"Go slow, young man. I am not taking that talk from any one."

"You must take it from me. You are a villain. You set out to ruin me."

"Well?"

"And I propose to settle with you."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes."

"I may ruin you yet, if you give me any of your nonsense."

"What will you do?"

"I'll interview your boss."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"Dear me, how you scare me!"

Bigelow began to grow a little uneasy. He remembered that desperate men sometimes turn and rend those who have wronged them.

"Look here, Frank, I do not wish to quarrel with you."

"But I am here to quarrel with you. I am here to tell you that you are a villain!"

"All right; let it rest at that."

"You're a miserable cheat, a liar, a fraud, a conspirator, a burglar, a scoundrel of the worst type!"

"Now you must feel real good."

"How do you feel now?" demanded Frank, and as he spoke, he dealt Bigelow a light blow upon the cheek.

An oath escaped Bigelow's lips, and he sprung at the youth, when he received a blow that knocked him clear off his feet. Like a cat he leaped from the ground and made a rush, when he received a second knock-down blow—a rap given with such force as caused him to roll over and over as he fell, and he was more slow in rising to his feet, and also more slow in advancing for a third attack, but Frank did not wait for him. He closed in on his man and dealt him a succession of powerful blows; indeed, his onslaught was terrific. Bigelow could make no effective defense, and he was considered in pugilistic parlance, a pretty able fellow, and when he finally fell he lay still.

Frank gave the man a few parting kicks and walked away, just as a policeman came running forward.

The latter went to Bigelow and raised him to his feet. The burglar was badly bruised and cut, but he had sense enough to say:

"It's all right. I got the worst of it."

"Was it a run in?"

"Yes."

"No robbery?"

"No."

The policeman assisted the wounded man to a bench, and Bigelow said:

"It's all right—leave me."

"What was the trouble about?"

"It's all right."

The policeman chanced to be an old-time rounder, and he did not fancy the trouble of an arrest. He walked away, leaving Bigelow to his sad meditations, and they were indeed sad.

"By ginger!" he muttered, "I'm getting the worst of it all round. Those fellows are too much for me. Something is up or that young fellow would not have dared to assault me. He does not fear me. I must look out. I reckon I'd better not went around to see Smith. I've seen his shadow; I've had a full report; I'll get."

Meantime, Frank walked away, well satisfied with the result of his interview with the man who had come so near to forcing his ruin.

As our readers will remember, Sleuth, upon receiving the papers from Smith, proceeded to his own home. He had determined to go over all the documents, and search for some clew that would lead to a discovery of the hidden treasure. His preliminary work was all accomplished; what was to follow was a direct search for the gold.

The detective spent the balance of the night reading the papers, and during the time he came upon some startling revelations.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE revelations of the papers were very interesting. The detective found a diary written in the French language, and he concluded that Bigelow, unable to read in the language had failed to solve the secrets of the diary.

We will not repeat the matter of the diary in detail, but merely furnish our readers with a brief outline of its records.

From the papers it appeared that one Pierre Franston, the son of a French father and English mother, had gone to Australia and had bought a claim. He had worked it for years with poor success, but one day struck a rich lead, and from that moment he began to accumulate gold rapidly. The man had married a beautiful woman, who died just as he was prepared to return to his native land with his great wealth. The loss of his wife affected his mind so greatly that he decided to go to America instead of England. The diary gave all the details of the ingenious methods for concealing a knowledge of his wealth, and was carried on up to the time that he embarked on the ship where he met with such a tragic fate.

The reading of the diary satisfied the great detective as to the existence of the treasure, and after having finished the reading of the diary of Pierre Franston, he commenced reading a record made by the old man Thatford.

The journal of the old sailor did not differ from the statements already known to our readers beyond the point that the identity of Gussie Thatford was fully established.

"I have not gained much actual information, after all," muttered the detective, when he had concluded the reading, "and it is strange that the old man did not leave some indices as to how he disposed of the money."

The detective was seated in his library. It was far into the morning, but daylight was some hours distant. Sleuth had determined to give over the reading for the night, and after quietly laying the papers away he extinguished his light and left the room, and was about to ascend to his sleeping-chamber, when he thought he heard a sound.

"Halloo!" he muttered, as he came to a halt. "What is that?"

The detective always carried his masked lantern with him, and as all the lights in the house were extinguished, he put his hand on his old timer and stood and listened. A few moments passed and all was still, and he had about concluded that he had been deceived when again a light sound fell upon his ears, and he advanced toward his parlor door. Again he listened, and was at length convinced that some one was moving about in the parlor. Stealthily he groped along until he reached the center of the large room, when suddenly he slid the mask of his lantern, and its bright light as it shot forth revealed to him a female figure; and a cry of astonishment rose to his lips, but it

did not find utterance, for the detective never let such cries pass his well-controlled lips. He advanced directly toward the figure, and recognized Gussie Thatford.

"My dear young lady," he demanded, "what does this mean?"

"Oh, sir, you will forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive?"

"I did not mean to disturb you, sir."

"You have not disturbed me. Come with me to my library."

The detective took the girl's hand, and led her to his library, where he once again lighted the gas and bid her take a seat.

The girl obeyed, but she was trembling like an aspen-leaf.

"Now, then, my dear child," said the detective, "tell me why I found you wandering around the house at such an unseasonable hour?"

"I could not sleep."

"And were you merely wandering around because you could not sleep?"

"No, sir."

"Tell me the truth."

"I knew you were in your library."

"And did that knowledge keep you awake?"

"No."

"What did keep you awake?"

"I desired to come and speak to you."

"And why did you not do so?"

"I did come to your door, but I was afraid to enter your room."

"Why did you not knock?"

"I tried to summon sufficient courage to do so, but I could not."

"Why did you wish to speak with me?"

"You will not laugh at me?"

"Certainly not."

"I had a dream—a strange dream."

"A frightful dream, I suppose?" said the detective.

"No, sir; only a strange dream; and I dreamed the same dream twice."

"What did you dream?"

"I dreamed I saw you sitting in this room."

"Well?"

"I dreamed those papers concerned me."

The detective smiled, and said:

"You must have had some intimation, and that explains your dream; and, indeed, I was engaged in reading some papers, and those papers did concern you."

"What have you learned, sir?"

"I have learned that there really is a hidden fortune that in right belongs to you."

"Where did you get the papers, sir?"

"From the old trunk."

"What old trunk?"

"The trunk that was taken on board the smack the night old Sailor Thatford was murdered."

"You have possession of that trunk, sir?"

"I have possession of its contents."

"The papers?"

"Yes."

"And what do they reveal?"

"I found a diary written in French."

"By whom?"

"Your father."

A moment the girl was silent, but she gave evidence of considerable emotion.

"You have heard my real name?" she said, at length.

"Yes, I have heard your real name."

"And there is no doubt as concerns my identity."

"None whatever."

"And my name is—"

"Franston—Gussie Franston."

"So much I suspected."

"So much you suspected?"

"Yes, sir."

"What led you to the suspicion?"

"First let me tell you about my dream."

"No, tell me what first led you to suspect your name was Franston."

"I have a curious paper, sir."

"I've got it!" cried Sleuth. "Got it at last."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THERE came the old-time look of satisfaction to the detective's face. Many times had he undertaken the solution of mysterious cases; many times had he been successful, and now once again victory had perched upon his banner! And how had he won? By a careful study and consideration of what may be termed the minor incidents of the many that had been presented to him!

While studying the papers during the silent hours of the night, he was convinced that there was a missing paper—a paper that would prove a key to the whole mystery, and there the fair Gussie at the last moment, and, we may add, at the right moment, makes the announcement that she holds that missing key, for the detective was so well trained that he needed not to be told that the paper she mentioned was the very one he was searching for, and as has been stated, a look of satisfaction came to his grand old face.

"So you have a curious paper at length?" exclaimed Sleuth.

"Yes."

"Let me have it at once."

"First let me tell you of my dream."

"Hang your dream! Let me have the paper."

"But the paper is connected with my dream."

"I care nothing about your dream."

"My dream was a very curious one."

"So you said; but it is more curious that you should have that paper. Let me have it at once."

"It is upstairs."

"Go and get it."

"The fact is confirmed that I am really Augusta Franston?"

"Yes, you are Augusta Franston."

"Then I am the party to whom the paper is addressed."

"Certainly you are. Go and get the paper."

"And you will not listen to my dream?"

"I will listen to your dream afterward. Go and get the paper, and I will believe the mystery is solved."

"I will go and get the paper."

A few moments later Gussie returned to the room, and she handed to the detective a small piece of parchment.

"It was sewed in an article of clothing. I found it one day long after I had been taken from the home of Thatford, after his death."

"And you preserved it?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not tell me about it?"

"I had forgotten about it altogether. I sewed it into the lining of another garment, and to-night I dreamed that I had done so, and I awoke with the dream deeply impressed upon my mind, and then I remembered; and I also remembered that I had kept the bit of clothing in which the parchment had been hidden. I rose and looked for it, and I found it just where I had placed it years ago."

"Gussie, you can return to your room, and now you can dream on; and to-morrow I will have a glorious awakening for you, I think, or I am an old fool."

The detective had glanced at the writing upon the parchment, and what had been Greek to Gussie was plain English to him; for he had read the other papers and knew just what to expect.

The girl returned to her room, and Old Sleuth sat down to read over—or rather study over—the paper that had been given to him under such remarkable circumstances, and a paper that was so all-important to the solution of the great mystery.

Sleuth succeeded in reading the riddle—for the little piece of parchment was a riddle—and it revealed to him facts that led him to prepare for an immediate excursion.

It is not necessary to the real interest of our story to interpret the paper, beyond the fact that from it Sleuth learned that certain papers had been deposited in three different places. The papers he had were duplicates, and could any one of the lot be found all the secrets of the old man Thatford would be made plain and clear.

It was just daylight the morning following the incidents we have described, when Sleuth appeared on the sea-shore near the remains of the old house where Thatford had lived. Sleuth sat down near the ruins and thought for a long time, ever and anon drawing from his pocket the little parchment. Then when the sun was fully up, he rose and

walked round and round the spot several times, and then started off in a bee-line.

Few men could have gone through the simple movements of the detective with such results as followed his singular tramp. He walked for a mile, and then came to a big rock. He had gone as direct to the rock as though there had been a line drawn from where he started to the point where he halted. The rock was located on a little knoll, and around it grew four trees whose roots evidently intertwined beneath it. The detective had come prepared, and taking from his pocket a garden trowel, he set to work, and after a few moments, his trowel struck something hard.

"I've got it," he cried, and after a few moments further digging, he drew forth a little oak iron-bound box.

"Here we are," he muttered, and at the same instant, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a second voice exclaimed:

"Yes: here we are!"

The detective leaped to his feet and found himself confronting a stalwart and villainous-looking man. The detective was gotten up as a very old man, and the fellow who stood before him said:

"Just hand that over, old fellow."

"Hand what over?"

"See here, I don't want to hurt you, old man, but you can't rob me."

"See here, young fellow, this box is mine, and there's nothing in it of value but the bill of sale of a schooner I bought."

"You can't play that on me."

The detective started to walk away, when the young fellow leaped forward and seized hold of him.

"Come, young fellow, let go of me."

The young man laughed, and said again:

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Thank you."

"So just hand over the box."

"You want the box."

"Yes, I do."

"And you're determined to have it?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, take it!" said Sleuth, and as he spoke he dealt the stalwart youth a clip alongside the ear that caused him to reel and fall as though knocked down with a club.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE fellow had indeed got his box, and such a good one that for an instant he lay where he had fallen in the sand; but in a moment he came to his feet, and made a rush upon the detective. Sleuth had laid down the box, and was prepared for the fellow's onslaught, and he went for him. Down the fellow went again, and he lay where he fell. Sleuth, meantime, seized his box and walked away; and when behind a hedge, he worked a transform; then he hid the box and returned to the place where the man had just risen to his feet.

"See here, young man," demanded our old hero, "did you see a man around here?"

"What sort of a looking man?"

Our hero described himself as he had appeared when discovered.

"Yes; I saw him."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know; I reckon he's skipped up there."

The young fellow pointed skyward.

"Nonsense! He is a harmless old lunatic."

"A harmless old lunatic?"

"Yes; he escaped from Flatbush last night, and I've tracked him to somewhere about here."

"He's a lunatic, eh?"

"Yes."

"Regular crazy?"

"Regular crazy—well, I should say so! He has an old box which he has buried a dozen times; and then he goes and digs it up every time he gets away, and goes and buries it somewhere else. I see he's been digging here."

"Yes; and he found his box."

"He did, eh?"

"Yes; and he's strong as an ox."

"You bet he is; but where did he go?"

"I don't know where he went; but he's a devil if he is crazy!"

"Yes; it's lucky for you he did not kill you if you came upon him when he was digging."

"I did."

"And didn't he go for you?"

"Yes, he did."

"Well, you're lucky he did not hurt you. And now see here; if you come across him, you bring word to the asylum and you'll get twenty-five dollars reward."

"If I see him I'll let you know."

The man went over toward the creek and entered a boat, and the detective returned to where he had hidden the box, secured it, and made his way to New York, satisfied he had made a good story to account to the fisherman for his singular misadventure.

It was after midday when the detective reached his house, and then he set to work to open the box. He found first some valuable family jewels and then the papers, and the latter contained full and explicit information on every point; also a will of old Thatford, bequeathing everything to his dear adopted child, Gussie Franston.

The papers revealed the fact that two hundred thousand dollars had been deposited with a certain banker. The latter's receipt for the money was in the box, and all the necessary papers for a full identification.

"And now, child," he said, "I will go and see this banker. I know him well. He is an honorable man, and I am satisfied your fortune is all safe."

The detective left the house, and by appointment met Frank, and to the latter he revealed all that had occurred. The young man was simply dumfounded, and he said:

"So Gussie is an heiress?"

"Yes, young fellow, and you are very lucky."

"How?"

"You love her, you dog."

"But she does not love me."

"That is possible. I did not think of that. We must know about that at once. You go to my house and see her; it will not take you long to find out."

"No, I will not go."

"Why not?"

"She is rich now, and will not want to see me."

"Don't make a fool of yourself—go."

A few moments after parting from Frank the detective met Bigelow. The fellow had been brought to a certain place by one of the detective's aids.

"Well, old man," said the detective, "I've got you at last."

"Who are you?"

"I am Sleuth."

The moment the man heard the name of Sleuth he turned pale.

"See here, Bigelow, you're a pretty smart fellow."

"Not smart enough for you."

"Haven't you found out by this time that roguery don't pay?"

"Yes, I have."

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you will leave New York and become an honest man, and with this honest money you can succeed if you try."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, I do."

The detective entered into full explanations with the fellow Bigelow, and the man expressed his gratitude at the opportunity for turning round to become an honest man.

The detective proceeded to the banker's office and made himself known, and told all the facts and presented all the documents, and an hour later returned to his home to inform Gussie that she had two hundred and fifty thousand dollars subject to her draft—the fifty thousand being the accrued interest on the original sum of two hundred thousand.

Reader, our tale is told. We could go on, in the usual style of closing novels, and tell what became of each character; but it is sufficient to say that Gussie as a rich girl did not deny the love that had grown in her heart when nothing but a workwoman, and she became the wife of Frank, and her little adopted sister so remained, to be loved and cherished until she too should meet with a Frank who would claim her under a dearer title.

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